

Luke 5:27-32

Readings: Luke 19:1-10
Luke 15

I want to look for a short time at a few verses in Luke chapter 5.

Read Luke 5:27-32.

Christ calls a man named Levi to be one of His disciples.

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.

这事以后，耶稣出去，看见一个税吏，名叫利未，坐在税关上，就对他说，你跟从我来。

The calling of Levi to follow Christ is also described in both Matthew and Mark's gospels. In Mark's gospel he's also called Levi, but in Matthew's gospel he's called Matthew. In all three gospels it's obviously the same event, it's not a different person in Matthew's gospel. So we're talking here about the apostle Matthew. And in the gospel he wrote himself, he doesn't call himself Levi, but he prefers to call himself by a new name, Matthew. Why do you think that is?

The Bible is full of people who have their names changed by God. Abram became Abraham. Sarai became Sarah. Jacob became Israel. Simon became Peter. Saul became Paul the apostle. I suggest that this is God speaking to us throughout the Scriptures, telling us:

John 3:3

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

人若不重生，就不能见神的国。

Becoming a Christian is not just choosing to follow another religion or philosophy. It's not a choice, something we decide to do (and then maybe decide not to do later). It's altogether different from that. It involves a complete, permanent change of the heart, which only God can give.

Throughout history God has been changing people. We all need to be changed by God in the heart and become completely new creatures. We all need to start our lives all over again from scratch, because we've all messed up the first time. And that's exactly what happened to Levi.

What was Levi doing when Christ found Him? He was "*sitting at the receipt of custom.*" In other words he was a publican, or tax collector. Publicans were hated amongst the Jews for two reasons: Firstly, they collected the taxes for the Roman occupying forces. The Jews hated that fact that their land had been taken over by the Romans, so any Jew who worked for the Romans was despised. Secondly, not only that, but most publicans collected far more tax

than was due, so they could make plenty of money for themselves. So for these two reasons they were considered to be among the worst of society.

In every society, there are two types of people. There's the respectable members of that society, which is probably the majority. They fully join in with the way the society operates. They pay their taxes and generally keep the laws. And it suits them to do so. But in every society there's also always an underclass. Those who either don't want to be a part of that respectable society, like hardened criminals, or who, maybe through no fault of their own, have dropped out of it. Drug addicts, the prostitutes, the alcoholics, the down-and-outs, and so on. People that respectable members of the society wished weren't there. Publicans were classed in this group.

I suppose you could think of them as "corrupt government officials." We don't tend to come across this much in our country, but there are plenty of places in the world where corruption is a normal part of life. To get anywhere in the society at all, you have to bribe officials. The Jews had to pay their taxes, and the only way to do it was through these official tax collectors, who also made sure that they pocketed plenty of cash for themselves.

So Levi was a publican, the lowest of the low. Collecting taxes but also cheating the people, and making quite a bit of money for himself.

Some publicans visited John the Baptist to be baptised, and he gave them a piece of advice:

Luke 3:12,13

"Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you."

又有税吏来要受洗，问他说，夫子，我们当作什么呢？约翰说，除了例定的数目，不要多取。

That's interesting. John didn't say, "Give up your job." So the job of collecting taxes isn't wrong in itself. It wasn't like, for example, working in a betting shop, or prostitution or anything like that. If we become a Christian from one of those occupations, we'd have to leave straight away. But there's nothing wrong with collecting taxes. On one occasions the Pharisees asked Christ:

Matthew 22:17

"Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?"

纳税给该撒，可以不可以。

To which Christ replied,

Matthew 22:21

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

该撒的物当归给该撒，神的物当归给神。

So having a tax system in itself is a good thing. We should all pay our taxes. What John was saying to the publicans who came to him, was simply that they shouldn't collect more than they were required to.

Now, we know that Levi/Matthew must have been one of the tax collectors at John's baptism. How do we know that? When the apostles had to find a successor to replace Judas, we are told the qualifications for being an apostle:

Acts 1:21,22

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

所以主耶稣在我们中间始终出入的时候，就是从约翰施洗起，直到主离开我们被接上升的日子为止，必须从那常与我们作伴的人中，立一位与我们同作耶稣复活的见证。

As Matthew later became an apostle, he must have had these qualifications. So he must have been at John's baptism, as were all the other apostles. When we think of Christ turning up at the Sea of Galilee and asking a few fishermen, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,"* we've got in our minds the idea that He'd never met them before, and they just dropped everything and left their jobs to follow a total stranger. But that's not what happened. In John chapter 1 we see that Christ had already met at least Andrew and Peter before, at John's baptism. And I suggest He met all those who became apostles there too. They'd already known Christ from that time, and they were all expecting one day for Him to come, tell them to finish their ordinary work and follow Him instead.

And that's what happened with Matthew. Originally something in his heart made him want to make the journey from Galilee into the wilderness to find John the Baptist. John gave him this advice not to give up his tax-collecting job altogether, but simply to treat people fairly. After having been baptised by John, a *"baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"* (Mark 1:4), he'd gone back to his tax-collectors desk in Capernaum with a renewed heart.

And that's why in the gospel that he wrote himself, he would rather use the name Matthew, which means *"gift of God."* He no longer wanted to be called Levi any more, because he knew that he'd really changed in his heart, and wanted to show the world that he was starting a new life.

Now he was no longer going to cheat the people, but only ask what was due from them and no more. But that meant his problems had probably only just begun. He would now be a lot cheaper to deal with than other tax-collectors, who wanted to make a fat profit on their dealings. So now, he wouldn't only be despised by the respectable members of society, but the underclass would now

despise him as well, because he wasn't playing their game of cheating the people any more.

And when we become a Christian, Christ has told us that things will become harder for us too, because we now want to do what is right. Christ said:

John 15:18,19

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

世人若恨你们，你们知道（或作该知道）恨你们以先，已经恨我了。你们若属世界，世界必爱属自己的。只因你们不属世界。乃是我从世界中拣选了你们，所以世界就恨你们。

John 16:33

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

在世上你们有苦难。但你们可以放心，我已经胜了世界。

When we become Christians, we may not want to go back to our old lives, our old companions, our old jobs, our old situation. All things have now become new within us. Our desire now is to do far better things, far more exciting things than just going back to our dreary old jobs again. But that's what we're normally called to do. Except, as I said earlier, if our old job was inherently evil, like gambling or prostitution. Normally, we're not called to walk away from a situation the Lord has already put us in. Rather we're called to go back there and be salt and light, be a witness to God's grace in that situation.

Life will become more difficult. But our calling is to stay there and develop the grace of patience. When the Lord's ready, He'll move us on. But it'll be in His own good timing, and not before. And that's what happened to Matthew.

One day, Christ came to Matthew's tax-collector's desk, and said, *"Follow me."* With new difficulties to deal with in his ordinary job, and the desire in his heart to completely break from his old life, he left everything he knew to start a new life as a disciple of Christ.

28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

他就撇下所有的，起来，跟从了耶稣。

Matthew *"left all"* to follow Christ. He wasn't going to go back collecting taxes any more, even though it was a perfectly lawful job. Once the Lord called him to leave, he obeyed. And we too should be obedient to Christ when He calls.

There's another tax collector in the Bible, who we read about earlier, called Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10). Did you notice what happened to him?

Zaccheus was a chief tax-collector, and he was very wealthy as a result. But after meeting Christ, he had a complete heart change. As a result, he gave half of his goods to the poor, and offered to give back fourfold to anyone whom he had cheated. That is the evidence of a new heart. He'd been permanently changed from the inside. His actions proved it.

There are plenty of people around today who claim they've been "born-again" by the Spirit of God, but the evidence of a new life doesn't really seem to be there, they're just as worldly as they were before. Now I know we shouldn't judge people, but you do have to wonder sometimes. Let's just make sure that that isn't us. Let's make sure that if we've truly been changed in our hearts by the Lord, then we produce the fruit of that change in our lives.

And we also find out from Zaccheus, that nobody is too far from God that he can't receive a new heart from Him. Even a despised tax-collector can become a true believer, a true "*son of Abraham.*"

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.

利未在自己家里，为耶稣大摆筵席。有许多税吏和别人，与他们一同坐席。

So Matthew holds a great feast in Christ's honour. And the people who came to Matthew's feast were "*publicans and sinners.*" The underclass. These were the only people Matthew had ever known in his line of business. And now he'd come to know Christ, the first thing he wanted to do was invite everybody he knew to his house to meet Christ for themselves.

When something so life-changing happens to us, we immediately have a desire to tell others about it. We want everybody to know that they too can have their sins forgiven and receive a new start in life.

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

法利赛人和文士，就向耶稣的门徒发怨言，说，你们为什么和税吏，并罪人，一同吃喝呢？

But the scribes and Pharisees get to hear about this feast. These are the respectable religious men of the day. They come to the house and ask Christ's disciples a question. Notice they didn't go to Christ Himself. That's the way people in the world behave. If they want to extract information from people they don't like, they go to who they think are the weakest first, they never go straight to the top. So we little ones at the bottom ought to always be ready:

1 Peter 3:15

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"

只要心里尊主基督为圣。有人问你们心中盼望的缘由，就要常作准备，以温柔敬畏的心回答各人。

The Pharisees asked the disciples, “*Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*” Of course the Pharisees would never do that. They’re respectable people. They’d have no time for the underclass. The underclass spoil their nice, comfortable, respectable world. So they looked down on Christ and His disciples for mixing with that sort of people. Religious leaders aren’t supposed to do that. That’s not very “religious” at all.

Jesus heard the Pharisees asking the question to His disciples. And He went straight to them and answered it Himself. He cut out all their political manoeuvring and worldly-wise ways of doing things. Christ is having none of that. He gave them an answer Himself, in the form of a parable:

31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

耶稣对他们说，无病的人用不着医生。有病的人才用得着。

32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

我来本不是召义人悔改。乃是召罪人悔改。

I want to spend the rest of the time now looking at this parable.

We only go to a doctor if we feel sick. If we’re feeling well, we don’t go, because we don’t see any need of going. That’s a simple idea we can all understand.

Christ then uses this simple idea as an illustration of the kind of people He’s calling: “*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*”

The righteous are compared to the healthy man who doesn’t feel his need of seeing a doctor. He can’t see his illness, his sin. He thinks he’s righteous in himself, so he doesn’t see his need of a Saviour. So he’ll never come to Christ, because he doesn’t see he has any sins to be saved from.

Sinners, on the other hand, are compared to people who know they are sick, and therefore do feel their need of seeing a doctor. Only those who see their sin can see their need of a Saviour. That’s all the parable is meant to teach.

But it is easily possible to misunderstand this parable. And that’s why we read Luke 15. Luke chapter 15 contains three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost (or prodigal) son.

The reason we read that chapter is that all three parables were prompted by an identical situation to what we’ve got in Matthew’s house here.

Luke 15:1-2

1 Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

众税吏和罪人，都挨近耶稣要听他讲道。法利赛人和文士，私下议论说，这个人接待罪人，又同他们吃饭

The situation is almost identical to the one we've got in Matthew's house. The scribes and Pharisees complain that Christ receives sinners and eats with them. And on this occasion, Christ doesn't just give one parable, but three.

All three parables have the same message. Something is lost, and is then found. That's the main point of the parable. And Christ relates this to the sinner who repents.

The lost sheep:

Luke 15:7

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

我告诉你们，一个罪人悔改，在天上也要这样为他欢喜，较比为九十九个不用悔改的义人，欢喜更大。

The lost coin:

Luke 15:10

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

我告诉你们，一个罪人悔改，在神的使者面前，也是这样为他欢喜。

And a lost son:

Luke 15:32

"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

只是你这个兄弟是死而复活，失而又得的，所以我们理当欢喜快乐。

Now, that's the only point of each parable. There is no other deeper meaning. But what we tend to do with parables is over-interpret them. We start asking questions, such as, who do the *"ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance"* actually represent? Or the nine pieces of silver that were never lost? Or the elder brother?

I heard a whole sermon once on the “elder brother.” The prodigal son, which is the main point of the parable, was hardly mentioned at all.

And these “*ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*” Who are they? Some people say that they represents all believers, all those that have been found and are now in the pen being good little sheep. I find that a bit difficult to accept because even though I have been a Christian for many years, I really can’t describe myself as “*needing no repentance*” any more. I’m constantly still needing repentance. Other people say that these 99 represent the Pharisees who *think* they need no repentance, which if I have to come down on one side or other, I would probably agree with this, because the context is the Pharisees complaining about Christ mixing with sinners. Others think these are the angels who never fell who “*need no repentance.*”

I’m sorry but I really don’t agree with any of that really. The problem we have is that, in all these parables, it at least seem to imply that there are many righteous people around who don’t need to repent. They stay in the fold. They never go astray. The elder brother, for example, never left the family home. The 99 sheep never left the fold. The nine pieces of silver were never lost.

And similarly in our passage. The parable at least seems to imply that there are plenty of righteous people around who don’t need to see the doctor, the Saviour. But these parables aren’t teaching that at all. The Bible is very clear:

Romans 3:10-12

“There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

没有义人，连一个也没有。没有明白的，没有寻求神的。都是偏离正路，一同变为无用。没有行善的，连一个也没有。

Ecclesiastes 7:20

“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.”

时常行善而不犯罪的义人，世上实在没有。

Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?”

人心比万物都诡诈，坏到极处，谁能识透呢？

Whenever we come across a parable, it’s only trying to show one truth. We shouldn’t try to read into it more than it’s trying to teach. In the parable of the hundred sheep, the emphasis is the one that got lost. The 99 who didn’t get lost don’t actually represent anybody in reality, because every one of us is like that one lost sheep. We’re rebellious by nature. Similarly, the 9 pieces of silver that never got lost, and the elder brother who never went astray don’t actually represent anybody. We’re all that lost coin, or prodigal son, every one of us.

Similarly here, there's nobody who's well, and doesn't need a doctor. We're all sick and desperately need one. We're all sinners and desperately need a Saviour. The only difference is that some people realise that, and others don't.

And that's what this parable is getting at. "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" Many people may think they're perfectly well, but none of us are. We're all terminally ill, but we don't realise it. Most people carry on with their lives never realising they desperately need a doctor to cure them, a Saviour to save them from their sins. But we do.

If we think we're righteous, we're never going to see our need of a Saviour. But if we see our sins, we see the problem, and there is hope. We've still got to go to the doctor. But it's better to see the problem than not see the problem. At least if we see the problem, we're now within the sound of Christ's call. And that's all Christ is teaching us in this parable.

And there's another possible misunderstanding with this parable. We might come to the conclusion that Christ didn't come for respectable people at all, but only the underclass. But that's not true either. These two types of people are just a picture. The real distinction is between those who see their sins before God and those who don't. Many respectable people come to see their sins, repent and turn to Christ, and are saved from them. And many of the underclass never come to see their sins, and so never repent of them.

The apostle Paul was about the most respectable person you could ever come across. He said about himself:

Acts 26:5

"After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

是按着我们教中最严紧的教门，作了法利赛人。

He was such a proud man. But after he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, his heart was changed. He had become a new creature, and his new life would now make him realise that pursuing self-righteousness the way he did – being so proud in himself – was all a complete waste of time:

Philippians 3:8

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

我也将万事当作有损的，因我以认识我主基督耶稣为至宝。我为他已经丢弃万事，看作粪土。

And he came to see that far from being one of the most righteous, respectable members of society, he now saw that, actually, he was the worst of sinners:

1 Timothy 1:15

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

这话是可信的，是十分可佩服的。在罪人中我是个罪魁。

And that's what Christianity should do to us. It should break our pride. The whole point of all of these parables is to try to get us, whoever we are, respectable or underclass, to see our sinfulness before a holy God.

But then we still need to do something about it. Many people can see they're ill, but they don't want to go to a doctor. Maybe they think he'll hurt them, or get them to change their lifestyle, or send him a huge bill or something. There are lots of reasons why people, even though they know they're sick, just will not go to the doctor. But, the doctor is the only hope they've got of a cure.

Many people can see their sins, but all that does is put them within the sound of Christ's call. They still have to respond to it. They still have to go to the doctor, to call upon Christ to save them. And that will mean a change of lifestyle. We must give up our sins. That's the cost. Many people can't do that. Christ will give them the strength to do it, but people still find it too painful to think about, because they love their sins so much. But going to the Saviour is the only hope any of us have of a real cure for the problem of our sins.

John 3:36

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."

信子的人有永生。不信子的人得不着永生，（原文作不得见永生）神的震怒常在他身上。

The call of Christ is a call *"to repentance."* That's not a very popular word nowadays. It's unheard of in most churches today. The modern gospel today is altogether different. It tells us that Christ can give you a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence. But that's not Christianity at all, it's humanism.

I spoke at a meeting in China not so long ago, and I mentioned we're all sinners and how Christ can save us from our sins, you know, the usual gospel message. And afterwards one young woman got up and said, "We shouldn't condemn ourselves," by which I took to mean she didn't like what I said very much. But that's what's taught in the churches these days. Don't talk about sin, don't talk about repentance. Tell people to think positive thoughts about themselves. Tell them they're worth something.

But the problem is that I'm a sinner. I'm not worth anything. What has this modern gospel got to say to me? Don't be negative. Snap out of it. But whatever anyone says to me, the fact remains I'm a sinner and I'm not worth anything.

What I need, and what we all need, is a Saviour to save me from my sins. To die in my place. To take the punishment that I deserve and to place it on His shoulders instead. And that's exactly what we've got in Jesus Christ. This is the gospel message. This is the only message that can effectually treat the human condition. Not just words telling us to cheer up.

I'm not quite sure what message modern churches have for anybody if repentance is missing. Yes, we need to have faith, we need to have hope, we need to have more love, love, love between us, all of those things are true. But if we don't repent of our sins, if we're not prepared to accept that we need to change from the way we are by nature, then we won't be able to produce these things of ourselves. We need the Lord to change us. We need a new heart.

Jesus Christ can do this, and save every one of us from our sins, if only we call upon Him in prayer. It's just a question of asking. And He's ready to receive all who come to Him.

John 3:17

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

因为神差他的儿子降世，不是要定世人的罪，（或作审判世人下同）乃是要叫世人因他得救。

Jesus Christ is our only hope. We all need to forsake our sins and come to the physician of souls. And let Him cure us from the one illness that matters.

Finally, I just want to look at one more parable:

Matthew 21:28-32

28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

又说，一个人有两个儿子，他来对大儿子说，我儿，你今天到葡萄园里去作工。

29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

他回答说，我不去。以后自己懊悔就去了。

30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

又来对小儿子也是这样说，他回答说，父阿，我去。他却不去。

31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

你们想这两个儿子，是那一个遵行父命呢？他们说，大儿子。耶稣说，我实在告诉你们，税吏和娼妓，倒比你们先进神的国。

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

因为约翰遵着义路到你们这里来，你们却不信他。税吏和娼妓倒信他。你们看见了，后来还是不懊悔去信他。

Let's not be like the Pharisees, who saw no need of a Saviour at all. Let's at least acknowledge our sins, and our need of a Saviour. That's what these parables are trying to teach us. And then let's want to repent of our sins, be finished with being the way we are by nature. Want to change. And let's put our trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who came into the world for the express purpose of saving sinners. He can save us. He can give us the strength we need to break free of sin. He has said:

John 6:37

"He that comes to me I will never cast out."

到我这里来的，我总不丢弃他。

May every one of us here today come to know the true, real, and complete heart-change and new life that only Christ can give, and know the real joy of having our sins forgiven through Him.