

## **Leaving Everything and Following (Luke 5:27-32)**

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Please be seated.*

Jesus has been teaching again along the lakeshore at Capernaum. When he is finished, he walks over to the small tax office or customs house alongside the road. Sitting inside is a despised man, Levi by name, whom Jesus has seen several times in the crowds as he has been teaching. Jesus looks at him and says simply: 'Follow me.' Jesus' invitation is a two-word command: 'Follow me.'

Think what Levi feels like when he hears those two words tap-tapping like a doorknocker on his soul. He is being called to leave his lucrative trade as a tax collector to become almost a beggar, sustaining himself on the sometimes-meagre contributions made to his Rabbi or Master. In an instant, he is being called from wealth to poverty. Why does he go, I think it's the same reason we come, that Jesus has sought him out and selected him on purpose.

That Jesus would even engage him in conversation is a marvel. He is despised. He is hated. He has been ostracized from respectable society. But Jesus cares enough about him to stop by and accept him. Jesus loves him, the most unloved man in Capernaum. And Jesus calls him personally: 'Follow me.' Since he was a boy, he hadn't imagined himself a righteous man. Now he is being called to accompany a holy man on his roaming travels. How bizarre! How wonderful! How frightening!

And 'Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.' when he stands up, the decision has been made, the die is cast, and he leaves his tax collection trade never to turn back.

Levi then replies to Jesus' invitation by issuing his own invitation to his new Master. 'Jesus, I would be very honoured if you would be a guest in my home this very night.' And amazingly Jesus accepts.

And so, Levi scurries off to prepare for a great banquet. This is no intimate dinner party for a few guests. Luke describes it with the word great. To his large house, suited to a wealthy man, Levi invites 'a large crowd of tax collectors and others.'

Now if you and I were there, we might have sat stiffly in the presence of these jovial social outcasts. We wouldn't be comfortable in the least! These are out and out thieves, unbelievers, open sinners, social pariahs. No, we wouldn't be

comfortable at all. We would wait until a reasonable hour, make our excuses, and leave with a sigh of relief.

But Jesus is comfortable. I can see him enjoying the occasion, getting acquainted with people who have been afraid to approach him before, now enchanted in his presence. He is eating heartily of Levi's sumptuous food, drinking of Levi's excellent wines, and thoroughly enjoying himself. His joy before them lights up this party of outcasts into an occasion that they will remember to their dying day. The afternoon when Jesus the Messiah ate dinner at the same table, shook their hand, put his arm on their shoulder, and embraced them in warmth and friendship. They will never forget, nor will Levi.

Levi has introduced his closest friends to his newest friend and is now ready to follow. The growing band of disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John who have despised him for collecting a toll on their fish exports, may have been stand-offish at first.

But when they see Jesus warmly accept him, they accept him, too, into this strange new ragbag fellowship of disciples called from all walks of life to walk with Jesus and learn his ways. It is giddy and glorious, and deeply moving to Levi, as he cleans up after the party. He is no longer Levi the tax collector. He is Matthew the Disciple, and it feels very good. Very good indeed.

But Levi's joy is mixed. Because he is the occasion for drawing more criticism to Jesus from the Pharisees and their scribes when they ask,

‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners’

Jesus, who is no doubt intended to hear this loudly spoken put-down, chooses to respond, instead of to let it pass. He turns to the scribes and Pharisees with a comment of his own.

‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ‘I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance’.

And so, Jesus answers the Pharisees' criticism, ‘Doctors aren't for the healthy, but for the sick.’

But how long has it been since we've made an appointment to see Jesus? To really talk to him about the things that are weighing us down. To risk him identifying the sins that we are all too aware of. Sometimes we resist going to

the doctor because we're afraid he'll confirm what we already know. And so, in our fear we try to avoid what we know is true.

I see two clear lessons in this passage:

Jesus doesn't really care what others think about a person, or how others value a person. He loves the outcasts and the unloved.

Jesus didn't concentrate on polishing the already righteous, but on rescuing the perishing. His mission is to the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the broken hearted.

Jesus loves you, whatever you've done. And calls you to follow him. Will you, like Levi, leave everything, get up, and follow him?

**Amen**

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