

17. Jesus Called Levi to Follow Him

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our children learn how to explain to others that Jesus is able to forgive sins. We also saw that we need to prepare our children for the fact that they will experience different reactions when they share that message with others. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus invited Levi to follow Him. We will also see that the scribes and Pharisees find a different reason to complain and speak against Jesus.

Luke 5:27-29 says, “After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.” The word translated “tax office” was the name used for the toll house or the place where a tax collector sat to collect taxes. The tax collectors were hated by the Jews and the people of other nations for two reasons. First, they worked for the hated Roman government. Second, they usually charged more than the taxes and kept the additional amount for themselves. As a result, they were considered thieves or crooks.

One day, Jesus went looking for Levi (called Matthew after he became a disciple of Jesus). When Jesus saw Matthew at the tax office, Jesus said, “Follow Me”. This was an invitation to Matthew just like the invitation that Jesus had given to Peter and the other fishermen. This meant that Matthew had to make a choice. The word translated “he left” means *to leave behind, to forsake or to abandon*. This word is used several times in the New Testament to quote what God said to Adam. One example is in Ephesians 5:31 where we read, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” As a result, we see that Matthew chose to abandon the job of tax collector and chose instead to follow Jesus. Here, we see a real example of the meaning of repentance. Matthew was turning from his idol of money and turning to God by following Jesus.

Levi immediately had a great feast at his house so that all of his tax collector coworkers and other friends could also meet Jesus. A great number of tax collectors and others came to share in this feast. Then, they all sat down together with Jesus. Jesus described the feeling of the Pharisees and lawyers when he said in Luke 7:34, “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” The self-righteous Pharisees felt that because Jesus chose to be a friend to the tax collectors and sinners and eat with them that He certainly could not be respected.

That is why Luke 5:30-32 says, “And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” The Pharisees hated to even talk to tax collectors. They would never have thought of sitting down and eating with them.

As a result, the scribes and Pharisees complained against the disciples of Jesus. Here, we see that the Pharisees spoke against those who had become Jesus’ disciples and were following Him. They

asked the disciples why they would even think of eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. Actually, they were probably trying to find out why Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. Because of their pride, the Pharisees could not understand why Jesus would be interested in being a friend to people the Pharisees considered the outcasts of society.

As a result, Jesus answered the question of the Pharisees. However, Jesus answered by giving an illustration. Jesus asked if it was the people who were well that went to the doctor or the people who were sick. The Pharisees were very religious and had many rules that they followed. They thought that those rules caused them to have a healthy relationship with God. They did not even realize that they were guilty of the sin of pride. In contrast, the tax collectors and sinners knew that they were sinful. In fact, the Pharisees made them feel like they were so sinful that God would never accept them. The tax collectors and sinners knew that they needed their sins forgiven.

Jesus said that He did not come to call the righteous. Instead, Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. The difference was that the tax collectors and sinners knew that they were sinners and the scribes and Pharisees thought that they were righteous. They were self-righteous and filled with pride because they thought that all of their rules were pleasing to God. They did not realize that their condition had been described by Jeremiah many hundreds of years earlier. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Many years earlier, the Lord had said to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, “...Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does not see as man sees*; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Jesus looked at the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes and knew their sinful condition.

The Pharisees did not want to hear about the need for repentance so they quickly asked a different question. Luke 5:33-35 says, “Then they said to Him, ‘Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?’ And He said to them, ‘Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.’” The Pharisees chose a very religious sounding question. They said that the disciples of John often fasted and made prayers. They said that the disciples of the Pharisees did the same. Then, they asked why the disciples of Jesus chose to eat and drink, especially with sinners, instead of doing religious things like fasting and saying prayers.

Jesus answered their question with a very interesting illustration. He said that the friends of the groom do not fast at the wedding of the groom. Instead, the friends celebrate his wedding with the groom. The friends can always fast later when the groom is taken away from them. Then they will fast in those days. Here, we see that Christ compared Himself to the groom at his wedding. Since Christ was with His disciples, there was no need for them to fast at that time. Later, after Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples could choose to fast, but not while Jesus was with them.

Jesus then spoke a parable to the Pharisees. Luke 5:36-39 says, “Then He spoke a parable to them: ‘No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was *taken* out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into

old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old *wine*, immediately desires new; for he says, the old is better.” In this parable, Jesus gave two illustrations to the Pharisees.

If a person has an old garment like an old shirt and that person also has a new shirt, the person does not cut a piece of cloth out of the new shirt to fix the old shirt for two reasons. First, that would ruin the new shirt. Second, the material from the new shirt would not match the old shirt. The Pharisees probably did not understand that Christ was teaching them an important spiritual principle. The Old Testament or Covenant shows that all mankind is sinful and guilty before God. Jesus did not come to try and repair the system of sacrifices that were a covering for sin. Instead, Jesus came to provide a New Covenant. He came to pay the penalty for sin so that sin could be forgiven and taken away. Jesus came to buy us back from the penalty of sin and provide forgiveness of sin.

In the second illustration, Christ said that a person does not put new wine into old wineskins. New wine expands as the wine ferments. The new wine will break the old wineskins and the wine will be spilled. Because the new wine will break the old wineskins, the old wineskins will become useless. The Pharisees had many traditions that they had added to the Old Testament. These traditions had nothing to do with the message of the forgiveness of sins. They were just traditions. Later, Paul wrote about similar practices when he said in Colossians 2:20-23 says, “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations--Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Here, we see that the traditions of self-imposed religion have no value against the sins of the flesh. The Pharisees with their many traditions had no desire to hear about the new life that Jesus offered.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that many people today also follow their own traditions instead of repenting of their sin of unbelief and placing their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such traditions may make people feel good about themselves but they are of no value because such traditions can never pay the penalty for sin. In contrast, the tax collectors and sinners realized that they were sinners that needed to repent. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to follow the example of Jesus as you share His love with others.