

BRING OTHERS ALONG

In Luke 5, Jesus saw Levi the tax collector at his booth. In His divine seeing, Jesus saw what he was, and what he could become. Jesus said, "*Follow Me!*" And "*leaving everything, he followed Him.*" Christ saw in Levi the despised tax collector a Matthew, the respected gospel writer.

No longer a calculator of coins, he would count souls coming to Jesus. "In this divine poetry," notes RK Hughes, "a covetous rip-off artist would become, as his name suggests, '*a gift of God to his people.*' No matter your sketchy past, Jesus Christ offers you a clean new future.

1- MATTHEW'S OLD FRIENDS. Verse 29, "*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.*" These detested people could only enjoy each other's company with their ill-gotten gains. And as Levi left his old life, he introduced Jesus to his old friends. They meet Matthew's new Master.

Someone contemplating following Jesus once asked, will I have to give up my old friends? Of course not, you'll want to share Jesus with them! This calls for a party. Levi's eyes were opened, and he shares his experience of God's grace. But not everyone was pleased.

Verse 30, "*the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at His disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*" They resented Jesus' popularity, and His teaching about Scripture didn't agree with their traditions. Why couldn't Jesus be more like them?

2- PEOPLE NEED JESUS. Tax collectors were easily the most hated men in Hebrew society. Despicable rich vermin. Classed with extortioners, the unjust, adulterers, prostitutes. They could not give witness in court. They were excommunicated from synagogues. "Unclean lackeys of Rome, low-life Levi and his friends were the lowest of the lowest," observes Hughes.

Religious Jews regarded them as even less, like Gentiles, unloved by God and by them. They could not understand why Jesus would associate with such. This is no idle question. RC Sproul notes that a prevailing idea of Jesus' day was 'salvation by segregation.' As in Leviticus 10:10, set yourself apart from sinners, to avoid any guilt by association. Jesus' actions enraged them.

"Jesus not only touches lepers, outcasts and sinners, He even goes to dinner with a house full of tax-gatherers," notes Sproul. This engaging was enraging. But Jesus answered them, "*those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*" Think on this.

3- JESUS CALLS SINNERS. Christ said, okay you grumblers, you grouch at My teaching, My healing, My forgiving, My calling, now grumble at this: should a doctor treat healthy people? The physician Luke records this powerful illustration, relevant then and now. Medicine had reached a high level in his day, and people consulted doctors as well as praying for healing.

But the Pharisees (religious zealots) and scribes (learned teachers) lacked compassion. They often miss the point of Jesus words and works, even when directed at them. Jesus explains in verse 32, "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (The self-righteous desperately need repentance, but will admit it only through a soul-quickenning work of God).

Just as Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic man, so Levi has come to Jesus in repentance and faith, turning from sin to God. Here he is in the company of unbelievers who need Jesus too.

4- TURN AND TELL TODAY! The self-righteous need a doctor for their souls and didn't want Jesus ministering to those who most needed it, notes Sproul, "and no one needed it more than these Pharisees." They did not see themselves as sinners in need of the Savior. In hypocrisy, they're not happy with Jesus for touching and talking and even saving sinners.

"God makes our next-door neighbor. We have to love him because he is there," GK Chesterton wrote. Jesus calls us to see ourselves as God sees us, to turn from our sins and be saved. Levi left everything of his old lifestyle, repenting and turning to Jesus who IS his new life.

Levi (Matthew) didn't stay in his old ways, but left it all joyfully, and gladly shared the Good News with other needy souls, with all that he had. Have you said yes to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? How has He changed your life? What have you left and what have you gained? How are you now being about the business of bringing Jesus to all your friends? ☐