

***A Sermon on Luke 5:27-32***

***Called to Faith in Christ***

People of God in Christ,

Over this past week in their Bible School program, the children have studied the theme of faith within God's Word. And the point has been, not just to know that God called various others to faith in Him, but to hear Christ calling them to faith in Him. For example, on Thursday the children had the story of Levi, the story of how Christ called Levi, better known as Matthew, to "follow me," said Jesus. And the point was not just that they know this story. The point was not just that Levi heard the call of Christ, left everything, and followed Him. The point is that the children too should hear Jesus calling them to follow Him.

And so the point this morning as we consider this story is that we too, children and adults together, might hear the call of Christ as well. Perhaps some of you have already heard and answered the call of Christ. If so, then here is the opportunity to hear it again. Your faith may not be new this morning, but let it be renewed as we consider the story of Levi. Let those who have previously repented of sin and believed in Jesus Christ hear again and remember the call of Christ to follow Him.

Perhaps others of you have heard the call of Christ before, but you have never truly answered the call in faith. If so, then may God grant that this be the day that you believe in Christ, the day that you hear the voice of Christ calling to you with such power and clarity that you are brought to lay hold of Christ with a deep trust in Him... because that's really what the ministry of the church is all about. That's what Bible School programs and Sunday School programs and the preaching of God's Word is about. The ministry of the church is about making disciples of Jesus Christ. It's about being servants and messengers of

Christ, with Christ speaking through His Word yet today to call sinners -- young or old; male and female; red, white or black -- to call all people to faith in Jesus Christ... because all have sinned, all are under a fearful judgment, all are objects of the just wrath of God due to fall like lightning upon this world. All are in need of salvation until they are brought to a true and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

And maybe there are still others of you, those who, if you were asked, would say- "Yes, I'm a Christian. Yes, I am a believer." -- but your faith is really a kind of acquiescence. Perhaps you're here more by the forces of culture and custom than by the power and clarity of Christ's call to follow Him. Maybe you're here through a kind of positive peer pressure. Church is where you're supposed to be on a Sunday morning. Church is where your family or friends go every week. So here you are. Rather than break a long standing family tradition, here you are. Rather than upset Mom and Dad and Grandpa and Grandma, here you are. Rather than feeling guilty for not coming, here you are. Here you are, but you're not here with a deep love for Christ. Here you are, but you're not here to worship Christ as your precious, glorious Savior, the One whom you refuse to live without, the One who is altogether lovely in the eyes of your faith.

Wherever you are... wherever each of us is in our relationship to Jesus Christ... may God grant that we hear the Word of God calling us with power and clarity to believe in Christ, to follow Him. And may each of us hear and understand as well what faith is, what it means to answer the call of Christ, because there is far more to this story than just hearing the call of Christ and seeing Levi get up and go. There is much to hear and understand of what faith is, if it be true, if it be a true and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

## I. A FULL-LIFE FAITH IN CHRIST

So as we hear Christ calling Levi to follow Him and as we hear Christ calling us to faith in Him, the first thing to understand is that He calls us to a *full-life faith in Him*. That's how we might describe what we're seeing as Levi responds to the call of Christ. Verse 27 says- "After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him." Levi's response to the call of Christ demonstrates a full-life faith in Christ.

You see, Levi was a tax collector, which means that what he had going was, what some would call, a "sweet deal." As a tax collector, he was in a position of authority to collect Roman taxes from the people. But the thing that made it such a "sweet deal" was that there was no government oversight, there was no ethics committee, looking over the shoulder of a tax collector and requiring him to play fair. And that left the tax collector, and Levi in particular, to play by his own rules, and to fill his own pockets with a healthy portion of what he collected. To put it another way, Levi was a rich man, and he was in a position to get richer still year after year.

So to use another common expression, he "had it made." Position, power and prestige were his, and the money was just rolling in. And yet when he heard the call of Christ to follow him, verse 28 tells us that "Levi got up, left everything and followed Him." Can we see now what it really means that Levi "got up"? When Levi got up that day, he was getting up from the lap of luxury. He was getting up from a bed of roses. And can we see now the "everything" that Levi left in order to follow Christ? When Levi "left everything," he left behind what only a few ever find in this world. He left power, prestige and wealth. And can we see now that when Levi set out to follow Christ, there was

no qualification or reservation in Levi's faith?

The point is not that every sinner called to faith in Christ must quit their job. Levi was entering into a time of training for the ministry and eventually he would labor full-time as an apostle of Christ and a minister of the Word. Not everybody is called to full-time ministry. But the point is to see that Levi's faith in Christ was no part-time, half-hearted response to the call of Christ. And you and I need to hear the same call of Christ today. Levi wasn't getting up to go spend fifteen minutes with Christ. He wasn't setting out to follow Christ as a hobby; this was no spare time commitment from Levi. And those who are called to faith in Christ today need to get up and set out in the same way. Being a follower of Christ doesn't mean looking for few spare minutes to spend in prayer every day. Being a disciple of Christ isn't about the great and noble sacrifice of spending an hour each week in church and praying before meals. Instead, true faith in Christ is a full-life faith in Christ.

Here is a point where we need to recognize how ill-served we are by modern evangelical spirituality. We should always try to be charitable towards others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we also need to point out error where error is found in the church. And too often what we see in the church today is a form of spirituality that has little to do with Christ at all, but whatever it does have to do with Christ, it makes faith in Christ to be little more than a hobby, little more than something you do with your spare time. And then it's what you do after you've gotten your entertainment in, after you've made the scene here, there and the next place, after you've done everything else you want to do, then if you have time left over, you spend it on Christ.

What we see here in Levi is the same faith that we hear confessed by the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21, when he writes- "For to me, to live is Christ, and

to die is gain.” It’s the same faith that Paul later confesses in these words in Philippians 3:7- “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.” So Paul said- “For to me, to live is Christ.” Levi got up one day, left everything and followed Christ. Why then do we settle for a spare-time, compartmentalized faith in Christ?

## **II. CONFESSION OF SIN**

The answer may be that we just aren’t as bad a sinner as Levi. And this brings us to a second point about true faith in Christ, that Christ calls us to a faith in which *we confess ourselves to be sinners*. So what made Levi get up, leave everything, and follow Christ that day? John Calvin comments on this event by saying that “in the great readiness and eagerness of Levi to obey, we see the Divine power of the word of Christ.” Indeed, here is the power of Christ as the Son of God, to command a man to come and he comes, to call Levi to follow Him, and Levi gets up, leaves everything and follows Him. That’s power! But surely the way that that power worked in his heart was to convict Levi of his need for Christ. Levi knew He was a sinner, and that drew him to Christ and made him ready and eager, as Calvin says, to follow Christ.

Again, Levi was a tax collector, which, for one thing, made him very rich and in a position to get richer still. But Levi was a tax collector, which, for another thing, made him a great sinner. You may recognize that the name “Levi” is a Hebrew name, which means that Levi was a Jewish man. So what was a Jewish man doing collecting taxes for the Romans? Even more, what was a Jewish man doing stealing money from Jewish people? Levi was not just a tax

collector, you see; he was a traitor to his own people. So yes, he was rich and getting richer everyday, but he was paying a price as well. He was an outcast among his people. He was the scorn of the nation. And he lived everyday knowing that he was increasing the oppression and misery of his own people under Roman rule.

We aren't told, of course, what Levi knew of Jesus before that day, but I don't think we're supposed to understand that this was Levi's very first introduction to Christ. In the chapters leading up to the calling of Levi, we read of how Jesus began His ministry, preaching from town to town, proclaiming the Good News of the coming kingdom of God, performing miracles of great power and compassion. Levi likely knew two things for sure: he was a great sinner and Christ was a man of great holiness and compassion. And now here He was, the great Jesus of Nazareth standing in front of him, looking right at him, and issuing him this command- "Follow me."--which surely Levi understood as the call to be His disciple, to follow Him in faith. And so Levi got up, left everything, and followed Him.

If we aren't prepared to do the same thing, to take up the same full-life faith in Christ, then it's because we aren't as bad a sinner as Levi. The call of Christ just doesn't ring with the same remarkable sound upon our ears. Follow you, Jesus? Where to? And leave everything? In exchange for what? And give up everything? To do what instead? Aren't these all questions that Levi might have asked Jesus before he even stirred in his seat? But Levi didn't ask a single question, because he already knew what he needed to know: he was a great sinner and Christ was a Man of compassion and mercy for sinners like him.

The question is whether we know what we need to know in order to hear the call of Christ. Do you know, for example, that you too are a great sinner?

Maybe you don't make a habit of stealing money from your own people, but your sin, like Levi's as well, is worse than that. When we disobey the commands of God in His Word, we steal from God Himself. We rob Him, as it were, of the glory and honor that He created us to give Him. The worst part of our sin is not the offense of one man to another but the offense of all sinful men to God.

Do we know, even more, how serious sin really is? Maybe we aren't an outcast from our own people, but our sin, like Levi's as well, makes us an outcast from God. And if we continue in our sin and die in our sin apart from Christ, we will remain an outcast from God forever and ever, never to know His blessing, never to enjoy His presence, never again to live under His gracious provision. That's why sin is so serious, because it leads to hell. That's why we need Christ. And that's why it should ring with a remarkable sound upon our ears to hear Christ saying to us this morning- "Come, follow me."

So if we aren't as bad a sinner as Levi, that's only what we think. That's only our self-deception. We're like the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law who afterwards saw Jesus eating at Levi's house and said- "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" But that's like asking a doctor, "Why do you spend time with sick people?" Or like asking an accountant, "Why do you add and subtract all those numbers?" What should Jesus the Savior do but minister to sinners? But the Pharisees didn't see themselves as sinners. If Jesus called them to follow Him, they would have asked all those questions? Follow you where? And why? To do what?

Only let them not be our questions. The teaching of God's Word is that God is a gracious and merciful God who provides us with a Savior. And that Savior calls out to us still today, "Follow me." But if that call rings cold to you, then hear and learn the further teaching of God's Word that "all have sinned and

fall short of the glory of God.” All are in need of a Savior. And the promise of God’s Word is that “everyone who calls on the name of Christ will be saved.”

### III. REPENTANCE OF SIN

Finally, then, let this too be understood about the call of Christ to true faith, that He calls us to a faith in which *we repent of sin*. We this see very clearly in Levi’s response to the call of Christ. Levi got up and left everything, including his sinful life as a tax collector. But we hear it as well in the teaching of Christ in verse 32- “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Let no one make the mistake of claiming a faith in Christ by which to sin all the more, as if to say, “God forgives sin; so I’ll give Him plenty to forgive.” -or- “God is gracious, so I’ll write my own rules.” -or- “God is love; He just wants me to be happy.” God’s Word knows nothing of such faith. Instead, Levi’s response in repenting of His sin is the clear illustration of what Christ makes clearer still. His call to faith is the call to repent of sin and to follow Him in obedience.

And yet, does this really need to be said? If the call of Christ first rings with a remarkable sound upon your ears, if you are struck dumb by the mercy of Christ to take a sinner like you as His disciple, then surely repentance of sin is not something you need to be convinced of. A turning away from sin is instead what you *want* to do, what you insist upon doing. You will not live in careless sin when Christ has *suffered* for your sin. Do you see the contradiction too often found in our lives, that we claim Christ as our Savior, we believe that He died on the cross for us, we believe that our sins were laid upon His back, and then having made that confession, having claimed that faith in Christ, we go out into a life of careless sin? Careless sin? In the life of one who claims that Christ

died for their sin? Brothers and sisters, it must not be. It must not be that we would have anything other than a bitter grievance within our hearts, even a bitter hatred within our hearts for all that is sinful remaining within us.

Instead we must pray and say and sing as the hymnwriter gives us to sing, and to say of Christ-

“O let me feel Thee near me! The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle, The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me, Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer and shield my soul from sin.”

Let that be our prayer. Not just the words, but the meaning, the desire, the passion within our hearts, to live for Christ, because He lives for us having once died for us on the cross.

His call to you this morning is “Come, follow me.” It’s a call to faith. Let us hear the joyful sound: Jesus saves, Jesus saves! Amen.

### Prayer

Father in heaven, give us to hear the call of Christ to follow him, to be His disciples, to believe in Him, to trust in Him, to know that He died on the cross for us. Give us a faith that repents of sin, that desires deeply to live for Him who gave Himself for us. Lord Jesus, thank for going to the cross for us. Fill us with your Spirit now, that we would always remember your sacrifice for us, your glorious resurrection, that you live on high, that you live within us. Sin need not be our master. We need not serve the flesh. Help us to fight and give us to taste of the victory that you have won for us as we put sin away and live for you, our resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray these things and ask them for your sake, Lord Jesus, and in your name. Amen.