

Luke 5:27–39 Jesus Calls, Brings Joy and Makes Us New

I love hearing people's stories of how they first came to know Jesus.

Some stories are dramatic. Others are much quieter.

For many of us, our story may seem quite normal and ordinary.

Kids, has anyone ever asked you, 'Why do you go to church?'

If you've been asked that. What did you say?

As for grown-ups, do you have a story to tell on how you come to follow Jesus?

And if someone asked you, "Why are you a Christian?" Are you ready to tell your story?

One of the recent stories which I read was about an Australian whose story was very dramatic.

His name was Andrew Chan, one of the Bali Nine who you may have heard from the news

some years ago. Andrew was involved in a plan to smuggle drug out of Indonesia and was

caught. For us, Andrew Chan was known by one label:

Drug smuggler. A criminal. Someone hated by people.

And in today's passage in Luke 5, We meet another man carrying a similar label to Andrew Chan.

His name was Levi. A tax collector. A traitor to the Jewish people. Someone hated by people.

But when Levi met Jesus, his life changed.

Let's us now look at the first point:

1. Jesus calls sinners to turn from sin and follow Him

Luke 5:27–28

The story of Levi starts from verse 27,

"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me."

Today, paying tax is a normal part of life. Working for the ATO is actually not a bad job.

But tax collectors in Jesus' time had a very bad reputation.

They collected money from the people for the rulers.

Many Jewish people saw them as traitors because they worked for the authorities who controlled their land.

Tax collectors could also collect more money than was required and keep the extra for themselves.

Because of this, people often thought tax collectors were greedy, dishonest & sinful.

Levi may have had plenty of money, but he did not have much respect.

You would not want to associate with tax collectors like Levi at all.

But Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office. Jesus looked at him and said: "Follow me."

These two words were both an invitation and a command.

Jesus was inviting Levi into a new relationship.

With this invitation, Jesus was also calling Levi to leave his old way of life.

Then verse 28 says: **"So, leaving everything behind, he got up and began to follow him."**

Levi did not say, "Maybe later." Or "Let me think about it." He got up immediately.

Levi could not continue living only for money and himself.

He now had to trust Jesus, obey Jesus and put Jesus first.

Levi left his tax office, his old job and his old way of life. It changed the direction of his life.

Now, following Jesus DOES NOT mean that every Christian MUST leave their job, leave school or give away everything they own.
But it DOES mean that Jesus becomes the centre of a Christian's life,
He is more important than everything else.

Boys and girls, following Jesus DOES means obeying Him at home, at school and with your friends. It means when Mum asks you to pack up, you obey and do it even when you want to keep playing. It means telling the truth even when you could get away with a lie.
It means being kind to the kid nobody plays with."

For everyone, following Jesus DOES mean leaving behind dishonest choices, unhealthy habits, pride, bitterness or the desire to control our own lives.

This is a reminder for many of us who are Christians.

Luke 5:29

And after Levi left everything and followed Jesus, Let's look at what happens next in verse 29:
"Then Levi hosted a grand banquet for him at his house. Now there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at the table with them."

Before the banquet, we saw Levi leaves everything and follows Jesus.

If we think about this, that sounds costly. Following Jesus means giving things up.

Following Jesus means sacrifice and that doesn't sound fun at all.

But then comes verse 29. Levi throws a party!

Levi has discovered something worth more than everything he has left behind.

He has found Jesus and he found joy in following Jesus.

And look at who Levi invites. Tax collectors.

The kind of people that the religious people didn't want anything to do with.

Pay attention here. Levi has only just started following Jesus.

He probably couldn't explain all the theology of worshipping God.

He hasn't been to Bible college. He hasn't sat through years of sermons.

And I don't think he could answer difficult questions about the bible.

But he knows one thing: I have met Jesus—and I want my friends to meet Him too.

So what does he do? He uses what he has. He has a house—so he opens it.

He has food—so he shares it. He has friends—so he invites them. And he brings Jesus and his friends together around the same table.

Sometimes we make evangelism sound so complicated. We often give many reasons not to share the gospel with others. We often felt I don't know the bible enough.

What if someone ask me something I can't answer?

What would that person think of me being a Christian?

And I think there is also a challenge here for those of us who have been Christians for many years. Do we still have Levi's joy? Can you remember when you first understood the grace of Jesus? That God really loved you? That Jesus really died for you?

Maybe after many years of following Jesus, It becomes routine. Church becomes routine.

The Bible becomes routine. And slowly, Christianity begins to feel more like obligation and a routine.

But look at Levi. He left everything—and threw a feast.

When was the last time our joy in Jesus overflowed into wanting someone else to know Him? Maybe we simply need to do what Levi did.

- Open the door
- Set the table
- Invite someone in
- And let them meet Jesus

After seeing Levi's joy when he met Jesus, we must learn not to keep that joy to ourselves. A very practical way is to invite someone to Christianity Explored and then attend with them.

Luke 5:30–32

Let's look at what happened to the banquet when Levi was throwing this party.

We can see in verse 30 that not everyone was happy.

Verse 30:

“But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” Can you see the contrast?

Inside Levi's house there is joy. But the Pharisees look at the same scene, and instead of been happy, they complained and questioned why Jesus would associate with sinners like them? And Jesus answers in: Verse 31:

“Jesus replied to them, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick.’” You don't go to the doctor because you are healthy.

You go because something is wrong and you need help.

And Jesus is saying: That is why I am here. I am the doctor who you need to heal you.

Then comes verse 32: **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**

Notice Jesus doesn't say sin doesn't matter. It was quite the opposite.

Jesus calls them sinners, and He calls them to repentance.

Grace doesn't mean Jesus looks at our sin and says, “Don't worry about it. Carry on.”

Grace means Jesus looks at sinners who cannot heal themselves and says:

“Come to me.”

And Jesus doesn't call sinners so that we can comfortably remain exactly as we are.

He calls us to repent—to turn around, to leave the old direction of our lives and follow Him.

That is exactly what happened to Levi.

Jesus didn't walk past the tax office and shout, “Levi, you're doing great!”

Instead, He said: “Follow me.” There is enormous encouragement here for anyone who thinks, Jesus couldn't possibly want someone like me.

Maybe there are things in your past you're ashamed of.

Things you've done that nobody here knows about.

Perhaps you are not sure about this salvation that Jesus offers to everyone.

Listen carefully to Jesus: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

If you know that you need forgiveness, you are exactly the kind of person Jesus came to call.

Learn from Levi, don't wait, just follow Him. But there is also a warning here for Christians.

The longer we follow Jesus, the easier it can be for us to slowly become like the Pharisees.

We only want to hang out with nice people but want to avoid the sinful people.

The church should NOT be a club for people who believe they are better than everyone else. And the church is not a gathering of healthy people congratulating ourselves on how healthy we are. Church is a waiting room full of patients who have found the Doctor.

It should be a place where sinners can meet the Saviour.

The good news is not that we are righteous enough for Jesus.

We are here because Jesus showed us mercy.

So let us admit our sin, come to the Doctor, Jesus and follow Him in repentance and obedience.

And this brings us to the second point:

2. Jesus brings the joy of relationship, not the burden of rule-keeping

Luke 5:33–35

After the Pharisees had complained Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, they raise another complaint.

In Luke 5:33: **“Then they said to him, ‘John’s disciples fast often and say prayers, and those of the Pharisees do the same, but yours eat and drink.’”** They looked at Jesus’ disciples enjoying the banquet and asked, “Why are they not fasting?”

So, what is fasting? As many of you know, I love my food. And almost every New Year, I make the same resolution: “This year, I’m going to lose some weight!”

And almost every year... it doesn’t quite work out. A few years ago, I had what I thought was a brilliant idea. I thought, “What if I combine my diet with fasting?”

Maybe if I make it spiritual, God will bless my diet plan, and this year I might achieve my New Year’s resolution!”

NO. it didn’t work. Fasting is not the same as going on a diet. It is not about losing weight. Fasting simply means choosing to go without food for a period of time so that we can give special attention to prayer and seeking God.

In the Old Testament, fasting was often connected with people humbling before God, repentance, prayer and seeking Him. For example, in Joel 2:12 God says, ‘Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Fasting also continues in the New Testament.

Jesus Himself fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry (Matthew 4:1–2).

Jesus also taught His followers how to fast (Matthew 6:16–18).

But He warned them not to make a show of it so that other people would notice them and think they were very spiritual.

Fasting was meant to be about our relationship with God, not about impressing other people. Christians can still fast today, and fasting is a good practice.

We normally connect fasting with prayer,

and when mourning or seeking God’s help with something seems to be the practise.

So, let’s look at why were Jesus’ disciples not fasting?

Jesus answers in verse 34:

“Jesus said to them, ‘You can’t make the wedding guests fast while the groom is with them, can you?’” Jesus describes Himself as the groom at a wedding.

A wedding is a time for joy because the groom is present. Jesus is saying:
“My disciples are joyful because I am here with them.”
This was not a time for His disciples to pretend to be sad. It was a time to celebrate.
The Pharisees were looking at outward rules. They were asking, “Jesus, look at us. We fast.
We pray.
We are serious about religion. But look at your disciples, they are eating and drinking!”

Can you see the danger in their thinking:
The pharisees think that by keeping the rules, it can look so spiritual.
And this is legalism. Prayer is good. Fasting is good. Reading your Bible is good.
Coming to church is good. Giving money is good. Serving is good.
The problem begins when these good things quietly become the basis on which we measure
our standing before God, or we measure ourselves against other people!

And without even noticing it, Christianity becomes less about Jesus and more about how good
I am.

Please take note that Jesus isn't rejecting fasting. In fact, He expects His followers will fast.
In verse 35, He says: **“But the time will come when the groom will be taken away from
them—then they will fast in those days.”**

Jesus knew that He would be arrested and killed. His disciples would grieve when He was
taken away. After Jesus returned to heaven,
His followers would fast as they prayed and waited for His return.

Remember, we don't fast or pray to impress God. We don't read our Bible to earn His love.
We don't serve in church so that God will owe us something.
We do these things because we love Jesus as we belong to Him.

Friends, legalism can creep into church so quietly. We can attend church every Sunday,
serve faithfully, know our Bible, pray beautiful prayers and slowly begin trusting our Christianity
rather than trusting Christ.

So don't measure our Christian life simply by how many Christian things we do.
Because at the centre of Christianity is not a religious scorecard.

It is not “Look what I have done for God, attempting to earn His love.”
It is looking at the cross and joyful responding and saying:
“How much Jesus has love me and has done for me on the cross.”

Now we have come to the 3rd point of:

3. Jesus gives us a whole new life, not a repaired version of the old

Luke 5:36–38

Moving into the next scene, Jesus gives the pharisees two pictures to explain what He means.

Look at verse 36:

***“He told them a parable: No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old
garment. Otherwise, not only will he tear the new, but also the new patch will not match
the old.”***

The picture is quite simple.

Imagine you have an old shirt. It is worn out. There is a big hole in it.

So you go to the shop, buy a beautiful brand-new shirt, bring it home, and then take out your scissors. You cut a big square out of your brand-new shirt and sew it onto the old one!

Nobody does that and you have ruined the new shirt, and the patch doesn't even properly match the old one.

Kids, imagine you have a brand-new footy jersey, and then you cut a big square out of it to fix the hole in your old one. Your parents would not be happy!

And Jesus says: That is what you are trying to do with me.
The Pharisees wanted to take Jesus and fit Him into their existing religious system.
Keep the old life. Keep the old way of thinking. Keep their pride. Keep their rules.
And just add a little bit of Jesus. But Jesus says: I haven't come to be a patch!

Then in verses 37 and 38, Jesus gives another picture:

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, it will spill, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine should be put into fresh wineskins.”

In Jesus' time, wine was often stored in containers made from animal skin.

A new wineskin was soft and flexible.

As the new wine fermented and expanded, the skin could stretch with it.

But an old wineskin had already become dry and hard. Put new wine into it and eventually, it bursts. Jesus is telling us something incredibly important:

You cannot squeeze the new life Jesus gives into an old life that you refuse to surrender.

Jesus is not something we add to our lives. Many times, this are exactly what we try to do:

Jesus, please help me when I'm worried—but don't tell me how to live.

Jesus, please bless my plans—but please don't change my plans.

Jesus, I'll give you Sunday—but Monday to Saturday belongs to me.

Jesus, I'll give you some of my money—

but don't touch my lifestyle in how I spent the rest.

Jesus, I'll follow you—but only as long as it doesn't become too uncomfortable.

Remember:

Jesus is not offering to repair our old life. He is giving us something new.

That's why Paul later says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!' That is Christianity. Not an old life with a Jesus patch sewn onto it—but a new life in Christ.

Luke 5:39

And then Jesus gives us one final warning in verse 39:

“And no one, after drinking old wine, wants new, because he says, ‘The old is better.’”

That is a simple but frightening warning.

Because sometimes what keeps us from following Jesus isn't that we don't understand what Jesus wants.

We understand perfectly well. But we just prefer the old.

“This is how I've always lived. This is just the way I am.”

- I know I should forgive—but I don't want to.
- I know I should change—but I'm comfortable.
- I know Jesus is asking me to surrender this—but I want to keep it.

2 weeks ago, Al Green shared that relating to people has never come naturally to him, yet following Jesus has challenged him to move beyond what is familiar and comfortable because people matter enormously to God. Now, through his work with AFES at RMIT, he deliberately meets students, builds relationships and shares the gospel—an encouraging reminder that Jesus can use even the areas where we feel weakest to help others take one step towards Him.

This is a great example of when we follow Jesus, we do not stay in our old way of life, in our comfort zone but to respond to Jesus to live a transformed life, putting Him as the Centre of our life.

And Jesus warns us:

Don't become so comfortable with the old that you reject the new life standing right in front of you.

The Pharisees were so comfortable with their religion that they nearly missed their Saviour. Please heed this warning and stay faithful to Jesus by leaving the old life and putting Him first.

I now want to take us back to the man we met at the beginning, Andrew Chan, the Drug smuggler. And what Andrew did was serious crime.

Drugs destroy lives. They destroy families and communities.

We should never minimise the destruction caused by drugs or pretend his crime didn't matter.

But Andrew Chan's story did not end with his arrest. Instead, while he was in prison, he heard the gospel, follow Jesus.

He repented and became a born-again Christian. He began reading the Bible.

He studied theology and he eventually qualified as a pastor.

Inside the Prison, Andrew ministered to other prisoners. He began telling other prisoners about Jesus. He also led Church services, baptised fellow inmates and prayed with prisoners.

Can you see the life transformation in Andrew Chan?

Think about that. The world looked at Andrew Chan and saw: Drug smuggler. A criminal.

Just as people looked at Levi and saw: Tax collector. A sinner.

But in God's eye, we are no different to Andrew or Levi, we are all sinners in need of a saviour, Jesus.

Andrew's story became even more confronting after he follow Jesus. Eventually, because of his crime, Andrew Chan was sentenced to death in Indonesia and in 2015 he was killed.

And in those final moments, the Christian prisoners began singing praise to God.

It is reported that they sang "Amazing Grace" and 'Bless the Lord O My Soul' in their final moments. Andrew Chan professed his faith in Jesus while in prison.

His circumstances did not magically disappear. He couldn't undo what he had done on earth.

And becoming a Christian did not remove the earthly consequences of his crime.

Andrew wrote his own eulogy which was read out at his funeral. This is what he wrote:

"My last moments here on earth I sang out hallelujah I ran the good race;

I fought the good fight and came out a winner in God's eyes.

"I leave now in peace and love; I pray that you will all know how I treasure you."

His's final request was that "at his funeral, he wanted us to talk about the God that transformed his life".

The wonderful message of the gospel and how it can transform lives does not put us beyond the reach of Jesus Christ.

If you are not a Christian here today, can I encourage you to be like Andrew, like Levi, hear the call of Jesus and follow Him. Don't wait.

Jesus is offering you something far greater. A new life. A relationship with God, our heavenly father. Get out from the tax office, whatever your "tax office" might be. And follow Him.

If you call yourself a Christian, this passage is also for us. Because perhaps our danger is different. Ask ourselves, are we a genuine follower of Jesus?

We may have been a Christian for a long time.

But somewhere along the way, perhaps Jesus has slowly become just a patch to our life.

We need to learn from Levi, leave everything and follow Jesus.

It means:

Everything I have now belongs to Jesus.

My time belongs to Jesus.

My money belongs to Jesus.

My family belongs to Jesus.

My career belongs to Jesus.

My future belongs to Jesus.

My whole life, All of life, all for Jesus.

So, as we finish, whether you have never followed Jesus or you have followed Him for many years, the invitation is always the same.

"Leave everything and follow Jesus."

Kids, this week, can you think of one thing to 'leave behind' to follow Jesus?

Maybe it's being grumpy when you don't get your way or not sharing with your siblings.

You can ask Jesus to help you by praying to him.

For everyone else, do you now have a story to tell others how you joyfully follow Jesus, a story about how:

"I am a sinner who needed a Saviour.

Jesus called me.

Jesus forgave me.

Jesus gave me a new life.

And by His grace, I followed Him."

Have you leave everything and followed Him?