

### The Call of Matthew; Contrasts Between Judaism and Christianity

#### Luke 5:27-39

*Luke 5:27-39: 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." 28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. 29 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. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." 33 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?" 34 And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days." 36 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. 37 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. 38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"*

#### Background Notes

If you were to travel from Egypt to Damascus, Syria, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, most likely you would use the major road known as Via Maris, or "Way of the Sea." The Via Maris went along the Mediterranean coast until it got to Caesarea, where it turned inland toward the Sea of Galilee. It passed right by Capernaum on the way around the Sea of Galilee, and then went on northeast to Damascus. So most likely the tax office where Matthew was sitting (v27) was a toll-collection booth along this international highway. The tolls, of course, were being collected for the Roman government under Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee at that time.

So Matthew the tax collector (who was also known as Levi) was probably *not* the most popular person in Capernaum! Some Jews would have considered him a traitor because he collected taxes for the hated Roman oppressors. In fact, most of the Jews would have considered him to be unpatriotic – but on the other hand, no one could complain about the benefit of the good Roman roads for travel! Tax collectors were paid well, and they had ways of "fixing the books" to their advantage - and Rome couldn't have cared less how much the tax collectors cheated the people as long as Rome got its due! Because of his occupation, Mathew would have been wealthy, and he probably would have had one of the biggest houses in Capernaum.

When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him (v28), Matthew left everything behind -- he got right up and followed Jesus! Most likely this was not the first contact that Matthew had with Jesus. After all, the Lord had moved to the Capernaum area and was involved in ministry there. Probably Matthew had heard the Lord preach, and he certainly would have known of His healing miracles at Capernaum. Maybe Matthew had even seen the Lord's miraculous powers. In any case, when Jesus called him, Mathew immediately resigned his position and followed Jesus.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Accepting the Gospel frees believers for celebration.

Have you ever heard an unbeliever say they don't want to become a Christian because it's such a dull and boring life? Unfortunately that's the way some Christians have portrayed the Christian life -- but this should not be the norm. Matthew had it right! Accepting the good news and following Jesus is a time for celebration! Our sins are forgiven, we're on our way to heaven, and now we have the privilege of serving the Lord, the greatest and most exciting job in the world. The Christian life is not dull and boring – it's a life of joy and celebration!

After he became a follower of Jesus, one of the first things that Matthew did was to celebrate by giving a big dinner in his home, with Jesus as the guest of honor! Matthew didn't hide the fact that he had become a follower of Jesus - and neither should we hide the fact that we have become Christians. Another purpose of Matthew's dinner was to introduce his friends, neighbors and colleagues to Jesus. Verse 29: *"Levi gave Jesus a great feast in his own house and there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them."* Some translations say that they "reclined" at dinner. In the 1st century people didn't sit on chairs at the table -- they reclined on couches around a large low table.

Matthew wanted to share the good news with others, and what better way to do this than to invite all of his friends and former colleagues to his house for a big dinner? Do you ever try this kind of relationship evangelism? Try it -- it works! Give a dinner in your home. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive – think cookout or pasta bar! Invite your friends and neighbors. You might even choose to invite a foreign missionary or a Holy Land tour leader with pictures, just to make sure the gospel is included in the after-dinner talk! It's a great way to celebrate and share the good news. Accepting the gospel frees believers for celebration.

### 2. Understanding the Gospel frees believers from legalism.

The Lord's answer to the Pharisees (v31-32) certainly emphasized what the gospel is all about! The gospel is not a bunch of rules for self-righteous people to follow. Rather, the gospel is the good news that repentant sinners can be forgiven!

In answer to the Pharisees' question about fasting, the Lord did not condemn fasting, but He put fasting in its proper place. He said there was no need for the disciples to fast in sorrow and mourning when their Master was with them. Being with the Lord was a joyous occasion, like a wedding! However, in the future when the Lord would no longer be with them, fasting would then be appropriate (v35). Notice that the Lord did not say that He would "leave" them, but that He would be "taken from" them, intimating what was to come in the future.

In verses 36-39 the Lord gave three little parables to illustrate and to emphasize that with the coming of the gospel, the time of Judaism and the Law of Moses had passed. A "new order under grace" had come! 2 Corinthians 5: 17 says, *"Therefore anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. All things pass away, behold all things have become new."*

The first parable at the end of Luke 5 has to do with old and new cloth. You can't patch old cloth with new cloth because the old cloth in the garment would rip. (Remember, this was before the days of pre-shrunk cloth.) In the same way, you can't patch or mix Judaism and Christianity. It won't work! At the very least, the result will be **legalism**.

The second parable is about old and new wine skins. In those days, goatskins were used for containing wine. New skins were supple, and they could contain new wine because they could stretch as the new wine fermented. However, you couldn't put new wine into old skins – the goatskins would literally burst apart and the wine would spill out. The grace and truth of Christianity cannot be put into the old form and rituals of the Law and Judaism that results in legalism. The new wine of Christianity must be free to expand within the new forms of the Church and Christian liberty.

The third parable expands on the second. Religious people who are used to the ritualism and legalism associated with the "old wine" do not like the freedom and liberty of Christianity's "new wine." In fact, this freedom can even be a problem for some Christians! If they continue in ritualism and legalism, it's evidence that they don't truly understand all the blessings of the gospel. Understanding the gospel frees believers from legalism.

## Practical Application

### 1. Let's leave everything, as Levi did!

Verse 28: *"So Levi left all and rose up and followed Jesus."* Levi (Matthew) left his questionable job of collecting taxes for Rome, the occupying power. But verse 29 says, *"Levi gave Jesus as great feast in his own house."* So obviously Matthew didn't leave his house or give away all his money, or he wouldn't have been able to put on the big reception dinner in the Lord's honor!

So what does it mean -- "*Levi left all and rose up and followed Jesus*"? It means that **his priorities were totally changed!** His home and money were now used to **serve the Lord** -- not himself! He was no longer entangled in the affairs of this life. 2 Timothy 2:4 says: "*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life.*"

So now Matthew was freed-up and ready to become one of the Lord's disciples. Levi is a great example for every Christian to follow. Let's leave everything, as Levi did!

## 2. Let's be careful about our use of Old Testament terminology.

In these three parables, the Lord was emphatic about the fact that you can't mix the new wine of Christianity with the old forms of Judaism. As evangelical Christians, I hope that we clearly understand His teachings. I hope we're not wrongly mixing up law and grace, or mixing up faith and works! However, some believers may still be mixing up Old Testament **terminology** with New Testament terminology. Let's be careful about our use of Old Testament terminology. Consider two examples:

1. The use of the term "altar call." An "altar call" today usually refers to an invitation for an unbeliever to go forward at an evangelistic service and receive Christ as Savior. But an "altar" is really Old Testament terminology. There is no altar now, because Jesus Christ has died on the cross for our sins once and for all. It is a finished work! **There is no need for an altar now.** Now we all understand what is meant by the words "altar call," and maybe this sounds like nitpicking, but an "altar" call is not New Testament terminology.

2. The use of the term "sanctuary." This term was used for the Holy Place in the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. To refer to the auditorium in our churches today as a "sanctuary" is Old Testament terminology, and it could be misleading. The fellowship halls or the Sunday school rooms are just as much a "sanctuary" as the "auditorium" of our church buildings today! There is no "central sanctuary" today, as there was in the Tabernacle or Temple of the Old Testament.

The use today of these two Old Testament terms is not likely to lead people astray, but they serve as examples. Terminology that seems familiar to us may be misleading to others. Let's be careful about our use of Old Testament terminology.