

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 5: 27-32

Brothers and sisters, peace to you. This is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord that we have come again to our time of Bible reading. We continue with Luke chapter 5; today we'll read verses 27–32.

If the previous section about the paralytic being healed took place in Peter's house—Peter's house was in Capernaum, and Capernaum was on the north side of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 27: "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.'"

Levi is Matthew, the one who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew himself records his calling in Matthew 9:9 (NKJV), saying there was a man sitting at the tax office. The same event is also recorded in Mark 2:13–14 (NKJV), where Jesus went out to the sea to teach the crowd, and He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. So this whole event should have taken place by the seaside in the city of Capernaum.

In Jesus' time, tax collectors actually held quite a lot of power. They contracted with the Roman government to collect taxes; they only needed to turn over the amount required by the Romans. As for how much tax they actually collected from ordinary people, the Romans did not inquire at all. Therefore many tax collectors invented all kinds of additional taxes; after collecting far more, they handed over what was due to the Roman government, and the rest was theirs. Because they were essentially helping the Romans oppress their own people, most Jews despised tax collectors.

But on the other hand, these tax collectors usually had very good relations with the Romans, and because they often over-collected taxes, their families were very wealthy and they lived very well. To collect taxes widely they often set up tax booths in crowded places so people could pay there. So when Jesus went out from Peter's house toward the sea, He saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office collecting taxes—in other words, he was caught in the act. Matthew's record is very good: there was a man, as if Jesus saw him not as a tax collector but simply as a man in need of salvation. Jesus saw him and said to him, "Follow Me."

Verse 28: "So he left all, rose up, and followed Him."

This verse is almost one of the hardest verses in the Bible to understand. Matthew was a wealthy tax collector, sitting right at the tax office, probably counting money, and Jesus spoke one sentence to him: Follow Me. He left everything, rose up, and followed Jesus—almost unbelievable. If we want a comparable example today, it would be like some financial professionals on Wall Street trading stocks with high risk and high leverage using other people's money—if they lose it's others' money, if they gain they take huge commissions. So they live very luxuriously; because of their wealth they then indulge in pleasures, enjoyment, and all kinds of extravagant and corrupt living. You can imagine Levi as such a person, sitting at the tax office, perhaps counting bills, when Jesus walked by.

The Bible records nothing more, but we can perhaps use some imagination: Jesus must have looked straight at him, and that look made Matthew's heart race. Then Jesus said to him, Follow Me. I somewhat believe that when Jesus spoke these words, He may have fully unveiled to Levi His unique divine ability, glory, riches, and perfection all at once.

Levi had always lived in a sinful and corrupt life; very likely he had some dissatisfaction with himself but could not escape such living. When Jesus fully unveiled Himself to Levi, he saw holiness, he saw glory. Therefore when the glorious God appeared to him and called him, Follow Me, Levi could immediately leave everything, rise up, and follow Jesus.

We truly also need to ask the Lord that one day He would let us see His glory, His riches, His perfection so powerfully, so that we can respond to His call. Following the Lord is not a matter of exhortation; others can exhort you, but you can never follow wholeheartedly unless one day the Son of God personally unveils Himself completely to you, letting you truly see His treasure; only then will you be willing to leave everything to follow the Lord. But for most of us it is probably once, twice, again and again, slowly seeing His glory. Levi may have been a specially chosen vessel by God; he did not need more—just one sight, and he completely left everything.

Verse 29: “Then Levi gave a great feast for Him in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.”

Levi’s salvation was a clear salvation; Levi’s following was a bold following. Right after he was saved he opened his home and held a great feast. As soon as he was saved he publicly declared, I am a follower of the Lord. He was willing to hand over all his riches completely to the Lord, and in his home he invited all his friends to sit down together, letting them personally see Jesus. When a person is saved so powerfully, God can gain many through his salvation. Especially at that time tax collectors were despised by general Jewish society; by gaining Matthew, many tax collectors were gained.

Verse 30: “And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’”

The Pharisees were very self-righteous; they tried their best to keep Moses’ law; because they kept it themselves they considered themselves righteous and looked down on those who could not keep Moses’ law. Therefore they called them sinners. When Jesus began His earthly ministry they always followed along watching. As a result, when they saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, they immediately complained.

In their hearts, like attracts like; they completely did not know God's grace, only seeing God's law one-sidedly. Although they also knew they could not keep the law fully, they placed the heavy burden of the law on others. When others could not keep it they called them sinners. When they saw Jesus extending grace to tax collectors and sinners, eating with them, they could not stand it and complained to Jesus' disciples.

Verse 31: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'"

Those who are well are not truly without sickness; they simply do not know they are sick. When you do not know you are sick, of course you do not seek a physician. When someone realizes they are not well—I am sick—they will seek a physician. Then Jesus said:

Verse 32: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Are there righteous people in the world? Romans 3:10 (NKJV) tells us, "There is none righteous, no, not one." In this world there are originally no righteous people; apart from Jesus Christ no one can be justified by the law. But though you are not righteous, if you consider yourself righteous you will not feel any need to repent. Therefore Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

God chose the lowly things of the world, the despised, the things that are not, in order that every one who follows the Lord would receive God's special salvation in grace. Therefore no one can boast in Christ; we are all sinners saved by grace. And Jesus came to earth to seek sinners. Matthew gave us a very good pattern; his salvation was a strong salvation; right after he was saved he left everything to follow the Lord. Not only that, he invited all the friends he knew in the past to his

home and asked Jesus to sit down with them, so that many sinners could be saved by grace. May the Lord also gain each one of us so powerfully.

Let us pray together: Lord, how we envy a situation like Matthew's. Lord, we ask You, through our daily pursuit, through reading Your word and praying before You, to personally unveil to us Your rich, glorious Self, so that we may know Your beauty. Precisely because we know Your riches and Your glory, we can let go of what we hold in our hands and be willing to leave everything to follow You. Cause us to know You more, to know You higher. In the end let us realize it is not that we can leave anything, but Your glorious riches attract us, making us willing to follow You all our life. Bless our life today, so that we may experience more deeply that You are the glorious One; also ask that this glorious One would personally appear to us. Thank You. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.