

Luke 5:27-32

There are a thousand ways to describe the good news but here's one way from Luke 5....

"I want you!" (Lord Kitchener's summons!) Jesus is recruiting. It's the largest movement the world has ever seen or will see. It's a kingdom that **spans the world, stretches back through history and on into eternity**. And King Jesus wants you. He wants you. In the next few minutes I'll explain why that's good news. In fact I'll explain why He is good news.

And I'll give you an opportunity to join up, to enlist, to say Yes to Jesus, I'll follow you.

Some here **already follow** Jesus, that's ok. This morning you'll be reminded just how good your commanding officer really is.

Some here have begun following Jesus, but you've **drifted**, and this morning Jesus is calling you back.

Some here **wear the uniform of Christianity**, but you don't have a personal allegiance to Jesus. You're involved in the trappings of Christianity, but you don't really know CHRIST. Not personally. Well this morning that could all change.

And **some have never followed** Jesus before, but this morning you could start. You came to this place not a Christian and you can leave with a new life, a new liberty, a new Leader. Because Jesus wants you.

But you're going to **need some convincing** I know. That's why we've got our bibles in front of us. Because this is God's word which shines a light onto Jesus. And I'm just going to show us from the bible who this Jesus is and our prayer is that you'll look and say to Jesus for the thousandth time or the first: "Yes, I want you. I'll follow you."

Let's jump into Luke's Gospel and see Jesus for ourselves. Look back to Luke chapter 4 and sentence number 18 and we'll see Jesus the Commander

Because in the early chapters of Luke, Jesus starts recruiting people for His kingdom. And they are not the recruits you would expect.

It all began back in chapter 4 verses 18-19 where He unveils His recruitment policy.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news **to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom **for the prisoners** and recovery of sight **for the blind**, to release **the oppressed**, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Here is the Commander. The King of the Kingdom. And this is His recruitment policy. Who does Jesus want? It's surprising isn't it?

The poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed.

Let's read on to chapter 5 to see Him put this recruitment policy into action.

First person he grabs, from v1, is **Simon**. Simon is going to be the chief disciple, he'll be renamed Peter, which means the Rock. In just a few year's time Jesus is going back to heaven and Simon, the Rock, Peter will be spokesman. But Simon's not a Rock. He's a fisherman. Ordinary bloke. No schooling. Wasn't a rabbi. Simon never got any prizes at Sunday School – or Saturday School as it would have been at the synagogue. If Simon was any good at that bible teaching stuff, that's what he'd have been doing. They'd have identified him as a future rabbi and he would have gone into training. Simon went into fishing. Never made the cut. He's an **establishment outsider**. Unschooled, ordinary Simon. And Jesus says I want YOU. Chief of the 12 disciples: I want YOU, v10, to fish for people.

And so he and his fishing partners James and John give it all up. The whole fishing business shut down that day and they joined Jesus on His mission.

So we've got Jesus plus three now-unemployed fishermen. Something's building. Who's next?

Verse 12 – a leper. In the day, a total **spiritual outsider**. In the OT this leper would have had to ring a bell and cry out “unclean”, they'd expel him from the cities. Total spiritual outsider.

Jesus says “I'll have you.”

Great. So: Jesus plus 3 now-unemployed fisherman and a leper. Who's next?

Verse 18: a paralytic. A **physical outsider**. Remember, we're in first century Middle East. No social services, no disability allowance. Life **goes on without this guy and he has to look on from his mat**. And Jesus says: I'll have you.

So: Jesus, 3 unemployed fishermen, a leper and a paralytic.

Who's next? Well here we are in our passage:

Verse 27:

27 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.

No, no, no, no Jesus. The fishermen thing was surprising, the leper addition was a nice touch. Like what you did with the paralytic. It's interesting, **this whole rag-tag outfit, rough around the edges, that's refreshing, let's go with that**. But a tax collector? That is nuts.

Because in the first century a tax collector was a total scumbag. Forget your experience with the inland revenue – this was a completely different league. Because 1st century tax-collectors worked for the enemy – the Romans. They were **Rome's go-betweens. The Jewish face of the Roman oppression**. And they brought their own people under Roman domination, and stole shed loads of money off them in the process. Think of World War Two and how the French felt about collaborators with the Nazis. Think of today how a Libyan protestor would feel about a

corrupt enforcer of Gadaffi's rule. That's Levi.

Levi is in bed with the enemy, getting rich off the misery of his own people.

And many people would have walked up to Levi and said "I've got **two words for you.**" But Jesus' two words were very different.

Follow me.

Have you ever heard the saying: You can tell a man by the company He keeps? Well Jesus, what are you doing? It's all very well helping out the establishment outsider and the spiritual outsider and the physical outsider, that's nice. But this social outsider, this man we all HATE and who IS HATEFUL. This scumbag. This sinner? Jesus, are you really FOR sinners?

Or, here's another saying for you. Have you ever heard the phrase "Jesus is the **friend of sinners**"? It's a nice saying. It's a true saying. But so often we hear it and we think of sinners as rough diamonds, and loveable rogues. Levi is not that. He is a collaborator, a traitor, a white-collar criminal. A scumbag. And Jesus says: I WANT YOU.

Jesus really is the friend of **sinners**. And I mean **sinners**. And if we're not ok with that, we're not ok with Jesus. As we'll see...

Well how will Levi respond to this summons?

What would Levi do? On one hand Levi had the life he knew, a life where he called the shots, a life that was financially secure. On the other hand there was Jesus – a life with Him. A life where Jesus called the shots.

Now there's no guarantee here for Levi about the kind of future Jesus will bring him. If you want Jesus, there's no guarantee in this life of career, health, wealth, success, fame, prosperity.

Following Jesus might mean losing your job. That's what happened to Levi. It's what happened to Peter, James and John. Jesus might pull the plug on all sorts of plans you've had – He's the Commander!

There's only one guarantee for the followers of Jesus. **If you follow Jesus, the one thing you'll get is Jesus.** If you want Jesus the *one* thing you'll get is Jesus.

But if we've got our heads screwed on right, He's the one thing we want. He's the One what Levi wanted:

Verse 28: 'Levi got up, left everything and followed Him.'

Nothing else had made Levi give up the tax collecting game. Not his parents' pleas, not his friends' urgings, not the public taunts. But two words from Jesus change the man. Levi gives up everything. Why? **To be with Jesus.** That's enough to change His life. And it does change

his life. Instantly.

Think of the change in Levi. It's stunning.

You know where the name Levi comes from? Levi was the name of the tribe of priests in the Old Testament. Levi's parents would have named him Levi with high hopes that he'd be a Levite – that he'd be a priest. The priests were God's go-betweens. Levi was meant to be the human face of a loving LORD. He's meant to bring people under the LORD's influence.

But through his sin and greed, it's all got so twisted. As a tax-collector, he became Rome's go-between. He was the Jewish face of a tyrannical empire, bringing people under Rome's influence. His sin had made him the opposite of who he's meant to be.

But now, following Jesus, he's freed to become his true self. Because what does Levi do when he follows Jesus? Verse 29:

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

Here's what Levi does. He throws a massive dinner party, invites his co-workers and friends and he brings them in to meet Jesus. You know what's happened to Levi? He's become a true Levite. Now he's doing what he was born to do – he's a go-between, drawing people under the influence of the LORD Jesus.

Levi becomes who he's meant to be, when he follows Jesus. That's the experience of millions down through history. Jesus doesn't come into our lives to stifle and repress us. He comes to release us from the junk that holds us back and to free us into who we're meant to be!

And Jesus calls out again, this morning, in this room, "Follow me. I've come to liberate you from that junk and to free you into who you're meant to be."

Don't think that the Commander is a kill-joy. Whatever He asks you to give up, it's only to release you. He's no kill-joy.

Look at Him at this banquet. Does He look like a kill-joy? He is **the life and soul of the party**. He is the life and soul of every party He's at, and He is at a LOT of parties.

You see He's not just the Commander. He's also the **Host**.

When Jesus came He was accused of being a party-animal. (Luke 7:34) All the religious types grumbled that He was always eating and drinking with friends. But Jesus refused to cut down on the dinner parties, because He's the ultimate Host.

[SLIDE – Host]

Do you know this side of Jesus? **Lord Hailsham** – the former Lord Chancellor – became a Christian when He saw this joyful side to Jesus. He wrote:

“The first thing we [should] learn about [Jesus] is that we should have been absolutely entranced by His company. Jesus was irresistibly attractive as a man... What they crucified was a young man, vital, full of life and the joy of it, the Lord of life itself, and even more the Lord of laughter. Someone so utterly attractive that people followed Him for the sheer fun of it...

Why did Levi leave everything? One answer is – for the sheer fun of it. If Jesus came into this room physically and said “Come follow me” would you follow? I’d follow in a flash, and with great joy. Just TO BE WITH JESUS! That’s why we follow Him, because we love to be near Him.

...[We need] to recapture the vision of this glorious and happy man whose mere presence filled His companions with delight...[He] would have the children laughing all round Him and squealing with pleasure and joy as He picked them up.”

Jesus the life and soul of the party. Do you see Jesus like that? Unless you see the attractiveness of Jesus you won’t follow Him, no matter how commanding He happens to be. But He’s not just the Commander, He’s also the Host.

And as the Host, Jesus invites us all to a **Feast to end all feasts**.

Jesus promises that when He returns He will host a cosmic banquet. On that day we will celebrate **creation renewed, death swallowed up, disease abolished, evil destroyed, sin cleansed, tears wiped away and an eternity of joy with Jesus**, the Host of the Banquet. You’re all invited. It costs you NOTHING. It cost HIM EVERYTHING.

There was **another meal Jesus hosted**. We re-enact it in church all the time. The night before Jesus died He broke bread and said “My body will be broken like bread to bring you the ultimate feast.” He poured out wine and said “My blood will be poured out like wine to bring you the ultimate banquet.” And on that cross Jesus was torn apart and poured out because it was the only way to bring sinners like us to the feast. **The Host really wants us at the Banquet**. It cost Him EVERYTHING to invite us. But He offers us a place for free.

But there’s one kind of person Jesus does NOT call to His Banquet. Only one. This feast is for establishment outsiders, it’s for spiritual outsiders, it’s for physical outsiders, it’s for social outsiders. It’s for sinners. Anyone can come if they own up to being a SINNER. But there’s **one kind of person who is not welcome: the righteous**.

Look with me at v30:

30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not

come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

You see the **Pharisees** and the teachers of the law were the opposite of the outsiders. They were the 'holier than thou' religious types. They were the establishment insiders, the spiritual and physical and social insiders. They are the cream of the crop. And they've been looking on as the Commander has been recruiting for His Kingdom and picking ALL THE WRONG PEOPLE.

They are so mad about it that in v30 they gate-grash a party uninvited and then start complaining about the guest list. Which is pretty strange when you think about it! But they are mad. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?!"

Jesus replies, Because I'm a Doctor.

[SLIDE – The Doctor]

Jesus is a doctor.

I'm a man, so I never go to the doctor. I complain about every little cough and cold like its bubonic plague, but I don't go to the doctor. If I ever do, I like to save up all my little niggles and sicknesses so when I go I have a decent list of ailments. Why? Because you don't want to go to a doctor when you're healthy.

No-one sits down with their doctor and says, 'I'm a picture of perfect health, I thought you'd be impressed.' They won't be impressed, you're wasting their time. Doctors are for sick people. And Jesus is for sinners. Only for sinners.

Look at verse 31 again:

31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Are you a sinner? Or do you claim to be righteous like these Pharisees?

What is a sinner? Jesus likens sin to **sickness**. That's a very good analogy to think about. Because sin is not really about the individual bad stuff we've said or done. I feel guilty for all sorts of things I've said and done in my past, but actually the problem goes deeper.

All those **sins** are like the spots you get when you have **chicken pox**. Have you ever had chicken pox? All these spots come to the surface and they're obvious to everyone and they're horrible and ugly. But the real problem is not the spots. You can try to cover up the spots all you like. The real problem is an underlying sickness.

And that's what sin is like. The bad stuff we do – that's like the symptoms, the problem goes deeper.

And my sins, my spots if you like, will look different to yours. My sickness might show itself in

pride and anger. Yours might come out as greed and gossip. And some will have really gross and obvious symptoms – like a tax collector. But we all have the same disease.

I spoke with a woman in Eastbourne who was waiting for her drug dealer. She said **“Give us £10 so I don’t have to sell my body tonight.”** We sat and talked, she’d been in and out of prison, there were things that she confessed to that were horrible, ugly, awful things she had done. But you know, I understood every decision that she had made in her life. Because I share the same condition. Her spots are a little different to mine. She hasn’t been so good at hiding them. But we’ve both got chicken pox.

I always find, it’s when I’m around the people I love the *most*... give it some time, and out of me will come a cruelty, a selfishness, an anger, a controlling spirit that’s shocking. And these are the people I say I love the *most*. What are we like? We’re sick.

And here’s the problem with our sickness. **We can’t cure ourselves.** This sickness is not in our hair or we could shave it off. It’s not a skin complaint or we could buy an ointment. It’s not in our hand or our leg or we could amputate. No we have a sickness in our bones, in our blood, in our brain and heart and soul. We have a chronic, terminal illness called sin. And if we never come to the Doctor, that sickness will go on forever.

You want to know what hell is? **Hell is simply our sick human condition that’s never taken to Jesus, never healed by the Doctor, just allowed to progress and deteriorate eternally.**

But here’s the shock about hell. **Hell is for the righteous.**

Look at verse 32 again – here’s what the Spiritual Doctor says:

“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Jesus HAS come for the establishment outsiders, the spiritual outsiders, the physical outsiders, the social outsiders. He HAS come for the sinners.

He HAS NOT come for the righteous.

He recruits those who say **“Pick me I’m unworthy.”** He does NOT recruit those who say “Pick me I’m worthy.”

Jesus is not the spiritual **prize-giver** – rewarding the good and punishing the bad. Jesus is the spiritual doctor – attending to the sick and only the sick.

A doctor can’t help you if you claim to be well. And Jesus can’t help you if you claim to be righteous.

You don’t claim to be righteous do you?

The bible is clear and Jesus is clear that no-one is *actually* righteous. But tragically, there are millions who fake it. They cover up their spots and fake goodness. And the Doctor passes

them by.

Because Jesus is for sinners. Only for sinners. In fact written across the gateway of heaven could be the sign: 'Sinners Only! Sinners Only! The righteous need not apply.'

Where are you this morning? Not the person next to you. What do *you* make of Jesus?

Perhaps you look at Jesus and you're attracted to the authority of the Commander, the joy of the Host, the mercy of the Doctor. But perhaps you think, "I couldn't follow Jesus, **I'm too bad for Jesus.**" But that's like saying "I'm too sick for the doctor." No-one is too bad to follow Jesus. You might think "I can't follow Jesus, **I'm not really a righteous type.**" Good! Thank God you're not righteous. Jesus is for sinners. No-one is too bad to follow Jesus. Badness is your qualification.

The real problem is people thinking they're too good. Is that you? Are you more like the Pharisees? You don't like the idea of Levis coming into the kingdom. Or at least you wish Jesus would invite them to a different feast, because you don't want to share a dinner table with that lot. But there's only one Jesus, one feast, one heaven. And if you can't pull up a chair next to the Levis of this world, you can't come.

But that grates with people – it grated with the Pharisees. So many don't want to identify with sinners like this. You don't want to admit to REAL spiritual sickness. But Jesus has only come for those who know their NEED and who come clean.

Some of us need to stop pretending, to let the façade down and to admit "I am a sinner. **Not** a sinner but-trying-ever-so-hard. **Not** a sinner but-not-as-bad-as-some. Just a sinner." That's who Jesus is for. Our hope is not in our health but in the Doctor's care. **Drop the act. Be a sinner. Come to Christ.**

I'm going to offer an opportunity to come to Christ now. You can follow Jesus today. There's no better time to do it. Levi didn't know when Jesus might next come past. And you don't know whether you'll get another opportunity like this.

If Jesus came into the room physically and said "Come follow me" wouldn't you follow? Well He has come into the room this morning, through His word, and here is your opportunity to respond.

I'm going to lead us all in a prayer. It's a prayer that asks Jesus to be **my** Commander, **my** Host, **my** Doctor. It's personal. Because Jesus wants each of us, personally.

The prayer is nothing magic, and these aren't magic words. It's just an opportunity to respond to the call of Jesus. He says to you, "Come follow me." And this prayer says, "Jesus, I'm coming, warts and all."

I'll tell you what the prayer is first.

It just says:

Jesus, You are the Commander – I follow You.

Jesus, You are the Host – I accept your invitation to the feast.

Jesus, You are the Doctor – I confess I am sick with sin. Forgive me and heal me.
Amen.

I'll ask us all to bow our heads. Let's pray as I lead us:

Jesus, You are the Commander – I follow You.

Jesus, You are the Host – I accept your invitation to the feast.

Jesus, You are the Doctor – I confess I am sick with sin. Forgive me and heal me.
Amen.

I'm going to be at the front of church after the service. And I've got copies of this book with me. It's called "A fresh start" and it's all about making a start with Jesus. If you've prayed that prayer and wanted to make a start or a re-start with Jesus, please come and say hello at the front. I'd love to shake you by the hand, and give you this gift as you start to follow Jesus.