



**“An Unlikely Call”**  
Luke 5:27-32

**Idea:** The Lord invites the sick rather than the healthy to join Him.

**Intro:** Spring is a beautiful time of year. We witness during this season the visible reemergence of life after the long, dark, and dreary days of winter. During winter a cold and lifeless disposition is ushered in over the landscape. The leaves on the trees dry up and fall off, flowers no longer bloom, and the songbirds migrate south. The days are short, and the nights are long. It is a gloomy season that seems to last forever, but thankfully spring is coming. Things are about to change.

The transition from winter to spring is a marvelous and beautiful cycle. It is like watching a resurrection from death to life. Martin Luther, the great reformer, thought so too. He said, “Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf of springtime.” Over the last few weeks, we have been witnessing this resurrection to life as the trees sprout leaves and the flowers blossom. The songbirds have returned, and things are again turning green.

On this Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of life that Jesus offers us. He can offer it because He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell the story of Jesus’ life and ministry. In them we discover that He is the Son of God who was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life, experiencing all that humans experience, yet He never committed a sin against God the Father. He was crucified on a cross, offering up His life as a substitute for the payment of humanity’s sin. Jesus was then buried in a tomb, and three days later He rose from the dead never to die again.

Jesus explaining His ministry said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10). The Lord demonstrated the power of this resurrection life throughout His ministry. As we have been working verse by verse through the Gospel of Luke, this resurrection life has been on display. For example, in chapter 5, we read of Jesus transforming the lives of four fishermen. He heals a leper who was *“full of leprosy.”* This walking dead man was cleansed and restored to life in the community. We also see Jesus heal a paralytic man. He had been carried to Jesus on a bed, but he walked away carrying his bed. Not only had the use of his limbs been restored but his heart had also been cleansed of all sin. In each situation, Jesus issued a call for these people to follow Him. This same call will be further displayed and explained in our passage today.

[Read Luke 5:27-32.](#)

**Inquiry:** It should astound us that the only one changed by Jesus in the healing of the paralytic was the man who had been paralyzed. The Pharisees, teachers of the Law, and the others who observed that miracle were

amazed and glorified God, but they were not drawn to the Lord Jesus as the man was. Verse 27 begins with the phrase “*after this.*” Luke is making the point that after the holy men failed to realize that the greatest need in their lives was the same as the paralytic, Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi, and He called this unlikely candidate to follow Him.

The Romans collected their taxes through a system known as tax farming. They assessed a district a fixed tax figure and then sold the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder. The buyer then had to hand over the assessed amount at the end of the year, but he could keep whatever was gathered above that number. Therefore, tax collectors collected more than what was required by the Romans. For this reason, they were despised. Jewish tax collectors were easily the most despised men in Israel. They were regarded as traitors and extortioners on par with thieves, adulterers, and prostitutes. They were not allowed to serve as witnesses in court or to worship in the synagogues.

Amazingly, it was this despised sinner that Jesus engaged and called to Himself. It was not the religious leaders who had watched Him heal the paralytic. From our perspective today, and definitely from the perspective of those present on that day, it was an unlikely call. We discover from this interaction that the Lord invites the sick rather than the healthy to join Him. In this interaction between Jesus and this tax collector, three things take place.

### **1. An assessment is made.**

As a tax collector, Levi understood assessments. The Lord Jesus also knows something about making an assessment. Luke tells us that Jesus “*went out and saw a tax collector named Levi*” (vs. 27). It is very likely they both had seen each other before. Jesus had spent much time in Capernaum. Levi had probably heard Jesus teach from afar. Maybe they had even spoken privately about spiritual matters. Whatever their history may or may not have been, on this occasion Jesus stopped and took a good look at Levi. He assessed the situation of this man.

What was His assessment?

Levi was a sinner. Everyone in Israel knew that he was a sinner. As a tax collector, Levi extorted and stole from his own people. He was dishonest and unjust. The piercing eyes of Jesus saw Levi for everything that he was. He was a sinner who had rejected God and His rule over his life. Jesus saw that Levi was in the same condition as all of humanity.

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... – Romans 3:23*

As such, he was under the just condemnation of God for His rebellion. Sin separates man from God and brings the punishment of death.

*For the wages of sin is death... – Romans 6:23a*

Jesus saw Levi in his sin with all its consequences. He saw Levi dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1). He saw him as one lost and in need of a shepherd. But, it was for this very reason that Jesus came into the world. He later would say to another tax collector, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10).

There are three things we need to recognize and lay alongside Jesus’ assessment.

- He seeks the sinner.  
Levi’s sin does not disqualify him from meeting Jesus. The Lord seeks this sinner of all sinners in his sin. Please do not miss that Levi is in the tax booth, collecting taxes. Jesus never asks or

demands for sinners to clean themselves up before coming to Him. No, He seeks the sinner out in his or her sin and says, “Follow Me.”

- He redeems the sinner.  
Levi was not asked to fix himself. There was nothing he could do to rectify his situation. Even if Levi had left the lifestyle of being a tax collector it would not have changed his status before God. It might have changed his status before his neighbors, but it would have done nothing to make himself right before God. He was not sinful and under the condemnation of God because he was a tax collector. Being a tax collector simply illustrates for us what was a deeper matter in Levi’s life.

Sin is a heart issue. Every human being is a sinner by nature. This sinful nature and rebellion against God are what leads to sinful actions. We are condemned before God because of our sinful nature. No matter what we may try to do, we cannot change that ourselves. It is impossible to change a tiger’s stripes. Or is it?

*“What is impossible with man is possible with God.”* – Luke 18:27

Jesus not only seeks this sinner out, but He also redeems him. Levi is forever changed by Jesus.

- He rejects the righteous.  
The transformation in Levi’s life is immediate and thorough (vs. 28). In celebration for what Jesus had done for him, Levi throws a party and invites his tax collector buddies (vs. 29). He wants them to find in Jesus what he found. In response to Jesus’ presence at this party, the Pharisees are offended. They cannot understand why He would attend and spend time with sinners. They hold to the idea that holiness requires total separation from sinners, which implies that they did not regard themselves as sinners.

Jesus did not require Levi to clean himself up before experiencing His redemption. The opposite was true. Jesus only required him to acknowledge his sin and to turn from it. All throughout the New Testament, when people ask what they are to do with Jesus, the answer is always for them to repent of their sin and receive His forgiveness and redemption.

When the Pharisees expressed their frustration with His grace, Jesus sadly stated that He did not come for people like them (vs. 32). He did not come to redeem those who think they have no need for a Savior. He, however, did come for those who know they need a Savior. Jesus came for those who see their sin and want to turn from it.

In this interaction with Levi, we see that an assessment was made.

## 2. A call is issued.

Despite seeing and knowing Levi’s sin, Jesus said, *“Follow Me.”* This invitation has three gracious aspects.

- It was an invitation to repent.  
Levi was invited to turn from his sin and to turn to Jesus. It is a 180 degree change in allegiance.
- It was an invitation to follow.  
Levi was invited to follow Jesus’ rule over his life. Luke stresses that Levi made a decisive break with his old life and began to follow Jesus (vs. 28).

- It was an invitation to the outcast. Levi, of all the people in Capernaum, was the most publicly unacceptable candidate for discipleship. Jesus sought out the man that no one else wanted. The people wanted God's strictest judgment to fall on Levi, but instead Jesus offered His amazing grace.

Like Jesus' invitation to Levi, the Lord today offers to you an invitation to repent of your sins and follow Him. And like Levi, Jesus is inviting the outcast to come to Him. In this interaction with Levi, we see that an assessment was made, and a call issued.

### 3. A decision is settled.

Levi had experienced the piercing gaze of Jesus. His sin and depravity had been exposed. As he stood there before Jesus, it was as if he was naked and bare. He was undone before the Lord, but rather than feeling only condemnation, Levi felt God's love and grace. He felt accepted, and he heard the Lord's invitation to follow. By faith he decided to follow.

*"And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."* – Luke 5:28

He could not return to his old job as a follower of Christ, so he was faced with a decision. Levi decided to leave it all for Jesus. There was a clean break in his life as he left everything, evidenced by the party he threw. Jesus was his special guest so his colleagues could hear the Good News and decide for themselves what to do with Jesus. Levi had decided to follow Jesus, and he wanted his friends to have the same opportunity.

**Conclusion:** Levi's story is like the stories of so many people here today. It is the story of being brought from death to life. It is the story of a sinful outcast being invited into the family of God. The Levi in Luke's Gospel is identified as Matthew in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 9:9). Matthew means "gift of God." In this beautiful story we discover that the hated and despicable tax collector's life can be so radically transformed by the grace of Jesus that he becomes an apostle and Gospel writer.

The call to Levi was an unlikely call. Well, at least it was from our perspective. In reality, this story highlights the fact that the Lord prefers those who know they are sick with sin. The sick are closer to the kingdom of heaven. What an upside-down perspective!

*...where sin increased, graced increased all the more...* – Romans 5:20b

Today, is the day of salvation. On this Easter Sunday, we celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We celebrate the life He offered up as a ransom for us. Have you heard the news of what Jesus has done for you?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven? Maybe you feel like an outcast or that you have sinned beyond the scope of forgiveness. Levi's story makes it clear that Jesus' reach is wide.

Jesus knows everything about you. He has assessed your life and knows your sin. In the face of your sin, He has also issued a call. Will you today decide to follow Him?