

## Bible Study Luke 4:31-44

*[Leaders; This study follows the sermon passage which was used for the Guest service in church. We have skipped Luke 5:17-26, but will return to that next week and there will be a study on that passage later.]*

1. In your experience what are some of the stumbling blocks that people have to the gospel? ie what aspects of it do people find most difficult or offensive?

2. **Read Luke 5:27-28.** What do you know of the name “Levi” from the Bible (ie not the Jeans manufacturer!)? What might this suggest about his background?

*Levi was one of the 12 sons of Jacob / Israel (Gen 29:31-34) whose descendants formed one of the 12 tribes of Israel; The tribe of Levi were devoted to the service of God in the tabernacle / temple (Ex 32:25-29). It is therefore likely that Levi is of the tribe of Levi, and perhaps his parents named him having high hopes that he would honour God (and the family) in his service of God. ie it's possible that his background is one of pious Judaism and family expectations.*

**Tax Collectors:** Were Jews who collaborated with the Roman Empire who had conquered their land. They collected the taxes from their own people, often at extortionate rates, and so became very wealthy, while at the same time being disliked by the majority of people and considered as irredeemably ‘unclean’ by the religious leaders and so unfit to worship God.

3. Why do you think Levi ‘left everything’ to follow Jesus (ie left his Tax Collecting role)? Was this *necessary*? Read also Luke 3:12-13.

*Notice that Jesus didn't command him to leave. And according to John the Baptist, being a tax collector was **necessarily** incompatible with being a member of God's kingdom. But it seems that **for Matthew** this role was in the way of his following Jesus – **for him** he could not do both. Perhaps he knew his own heart, his greed, his past, or the direction he now wanted to take. Perhaps this role had become his substitute for a real relationship with God, and so he had to give it up in order to follow Jesus.*

4. **Read Luke 5:29-30.** Why do you think Levi held this banquet for Jesus? Read also John 1:40-42, 4:28-30.

*One of the most natural responses to meeting Jesus and entering a real relationship with him is that you will want to introduce others you know to him too. Someone has described a Christian as, ‘One beggar who has found food telling other beggars where they can find food too.’*

5. The word “Pharisee” most likely came from the term “Separated ones”, perhaps stemming from God's command to the Israelites living in exile to “go out from there! Touch no unclean thing...” Isa 52:11. What is right about wanting to be “separate” as God's people? What did the Pharisees have wrong?

*God has called us to holiness and purity in an impure world. We are to live for him and so be different or ‘separate’ from the surrounding world that lives for self. The Pharisees took this to mean that they alone were the ones who could live this way (and those who followed their rules), forgetting that it was only by God's mercy that they themselves had been separated, and that God's mercy continued to extend to others who needed to hear and heed his call. Change, mercy, forgiveness are not highly valued amongst those who value highly their own efforts – those that we might call legalists or the self-righteous.*

6. **Read Luke 5:31-32.** What did the Pharisees have to realise about Jesus?

*He's not like them! He stands apart from “the righteous” and “sinners” – he is the “doctor” and he “has come” with a purpose – bold claims that are either exceedingly arrogant, or delusional, or suggest that he has come from God himself.*

7. Consider this interchange between Jesus, the Pharisees and Levi. What does it reveal about ‘religion’? Why does it fail to bring salvation? How is Christianity different?

*The Pharisees represent a typical religious attitude – God is interested in our actions and we can do what God wants (or even what he **needs**). It exalts the human and not God's character. And it fails to impact the heart or will – Levi is not drawn into God's kingdom but rather pushed away because he can never measure up to their standards. But he is won by Jesus' initiative and mercy – he is offered relationship (follow me) and responds with amazing and deep-seated change – he leaves ‘everything’. He wasn't told what to do, but that is the power of Jesus' work. Christianity is all about God and his initiative in coming to us and dealing with our guilt – whatever we do is only ever in response, never to be exulted in.*

8. According to this passage, what is the way into God's kingdom? Is it easy or hard, liberating or restricting?

*Jesus calls us to “repent” – not simply “believe” – response is needed – a change of mind (the meaning of the word) that impacts our whole lives. It will mean giving up certain things that prevent us from having a relationship with Jesus, but it will free us from all that kept us out of eternal life with him. It is both deeply humbling and profoundly liberating to heed Jesus' call and ‘follow him’.*