



## Who comes to my parties No 7

## Luke 5 verses 27 to 32

This passage once again reveals a pattern in Jesus' ministry. He reaches out to those who are marginalised in 1<sup>st</sup> century society. Earlier in the chapter it was to those with physical limitations – here we have Jesus engaging with people who were regarded as social outcasts. Tax collectors were seen as Roman agents fleecing the population and not opposed to taking a cut themselves. Luke 3:10 to 14 gives you more background on how tax collectors were regarded by the Jews of the time.

The question here is whether Jesus' policy is to stay separate from lesser members of society – that was the practice of the Pharisees who regarded tax collectors as defectors from the household of Israel. This is an ongoing theme throughout Jesus' ministry. Levi's call is a pointed statement that Jesus accepts outcasts who come to him in repentance and faith. Entering the house of such a man would have made Jesus a very poor example in Jewish society.

Is there ever a danger that we choose the people we make welcome on the basis of their status in society? We may deny it but do we sometimes do it unconsciously?  
Is the church open to all members of the community?

After the healing of the paralytic Jesus spots a tax collector – his toll booth was there to collect a surcharge as people travelled from city to city. It is worth noting that Jesus approached Levi – not the other way round. Jesus gave an opportunity for response to a person society rejected. His call to Levi was to 'follow him' and Levi does just that. The language used implies a wholehearted commitment to discipleship.

Jesus' approach to Levi was full frontal. Levi's response was immediate. Is this a model for how we should approach people today?  
Does our natural reserve hold us back?  
If we believe that the best thing that can happen to a person is to become a Christian, should we be bolder?

Levi's follow up is amazing. Having been called by Jesus, he wants all his mates to know about it. The party was for 'tax collectors and others'. You can almost imagine Levi's neighbours watching who turns up and muttering about the kind of rough necks and rejects arriving at the house of the despised tax collector. Levi was probably rich enough to afford to throw a big party but the thrust of the narrative is that Levi, having become a follower, is very keen for all his acquaintances to experience the joy he now has.

This question is obvious but one we should not avoid.  
Does our faith in Jesus Christ mean so much to us that we want to find any way we can to help our friends know about it?  
We may not be able to throw a big party but think of other ways you could help others to find a relationship with Jesus.  
(A valid answer is to bring your friends to church but it's not the only one)

If you want to spend some time reading a gospel right through it is interesting to see how opposition to Jesus grew through his three years of ministry. This incident is in the first year of Jesus' ministry but the religious establishment is pursuing him. Their thinking was that, if they kept everything quiet and subdued, the Roman authorities would allow them to keep observing their religious practices. Ironically, some of those practices

were designed to raise cash for the temple coffers. The last thing they wanted was a radical prophet stirring up the people as they got excited about a faith that worked.

How do we respond when friends or family complain about our passion to follow Jesus?  
When there is conflict, how do we balance our love for God and the love we have for family and friends?

The criticism is all too familiar. It is not directed at Jesus – the Pharisees go for the disciples. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Judah, sitting at a table communicated an acceptance of the people you ate with. The Pharisees avoided anybody who were obviously ‘sinners’ – they were people whose bad behaviour was obvious to everybody. If they ate with anyone, they would be condoning their behaviour. The contrast could not be starker. Pharisees want complete separation – Jesus wants to see sinners redeemed.

Are there dangers that our church attendance becomes so important (and it is) that we stop looking out for those who have no living faith?  
Are we doing ‘CHURCHianity’ rather than ‘CHRISTianity’

Jesus’ final comment as, usual, is straight to the point and impossible not to understand. We go to the doctor when we have a need not when we’re fit and well – you really can’t argue with that. Jesus’ call to follow him goes out to people who know they need him. The self-sufficient will not respond – that was the Pharisees problem.

Jesus reaches out to those who know they are sinners before a holy God. But he sees the potential for restoration and renewal and, if their desire is for them to be restored, Jesus will meet them in their need. His mission is to reach out to people who are lost just like Levi.

If you have time, it may be good to share your stories of how Jesus reached out to you.  
Pray that God will point you to people who need to hear about the good news of Jesus.

**This narrative gives us a clear statement of Jesus’ purpose.**

**His words are not always comfortable**

**There may be people in your life who doubt your passion to follow Jesus**

**But it is clear that Jesus regards faith in him as the only way to live**

**Think about someone you know**

**How could you invite them to your ‘party’ even if that’s just a cup of coffee?**

**Could you be a blessing and be blessed by widening your friendships?**