

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Purpose of the Saviour

Luke 5:32

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Greetings and welcome to this broadcast from *Truth for Today*, where we begin a four week series entitled the Gospel of Christ Jesus. For today's talk the administrators have allocated to me the specific title of, The Purpose of the Saviour, having in mind Luke chapter five and verse thirty-two where the Lord says:

"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

I ought to say now that whenever I quote from the Scriptures in this talk, I will be using the English Standard Version of the scriptures. The context of this quotation was the call of Levi to leave his despised occupation, as a tax collector, in order to become a disciple of Jesus. We can see how this happened by looking at verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight of chapter five of Luke:

"After this he [Jesus] went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."

Perhaps a word would be useful as to why a tax-collector was so objectionable to his fellow countrymen. Tax collecting powers had been "farmed off" by the Romans to Jews, who were willing to collaborate and perform this task. The visible domination of the Roman soldiers was an every-day sight that insulted the national and religious sensibilities of the inhabitants of Judea and Galilee, constantly reminding them of their position as a subjugated people. Further to this the tax-collecting powers were not exercised justly, for those extracting the money were generally corrupt. Consequently, the Pharisees especially were incensed that Jews could be found who gladly countenanced such a betrayal of national life and values. Another factor was that in the course of his work Matthew, or Levi to give him his alternative name, was brought into close contact with the despised Gentiles, which all added to his ritual uncleanness. This meant that those, such as Matthew, would be a source of moral contamination, hence the carping criticism and condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees against the Lord, because He ate and drank with such people who they called sinners.

Tax collecting was a high visibility job as there would be two possible locations where Matthew would work. On one side of the road he could be seen collecting tolls as merchandise was transported between major cities or, alternatively, receiving customs duty when goods were carried across the lake by boat. Whichever way was utilised, the end result was the same, with revenue being collected from unwilling purses, no doubt accompanied by curses. Matthew would have to stand-up to threats and possible violence, meaning arrogance and contempt, rather than meekness, would be qualities that marked a collector of taxes. Notwithstanding this repugnance it was a job that could yield good material rewards for those who could withstand hatred and

reproach. We need to acknowledge that when Matthew left everything it was a major decision. Peter and John could always return to their fishing if things did not work out. Matthew, however, would know that his post would soon be filled and there would be no going back. There is an aspect of Matthew leaving his collecting desk that matches the chorus that begins, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back." Have we heard the Lord's gracious call to follow Him in our world?

There was no long interview before Levi heard the call of the Lord to follow Him, which was obviously a call to discipleship. Unlike today's employment scene, where our abilities are carefully assessed by a prospective employer, or even by an agent of the employer, the call to follow the Lord comes in different ways. We must be careful that we do not consider Christianity as a spectator sport. When I was younger I had much to do with Youth for Christ rallies, for which I am thankful to God. I am also grateful to the men and women that organised these rallies, as they could have been content with counting the number of decisions at the various rallies. Instead they arranged regular meetings where we could meet together and consider the implications of becoming a Christian, a task that was also consolidated by the fellowship of Christians at my local church. Consequently, we were taught what it meant to follow the Lord Jesus.

Recently I was at a secular meeting, where a lady had to outline her qualities and qualifications that she thought would make her suitable for employment as a heritage officer. Nothing like that took place on the day that Levi met the Lord. The only detail that we know is that he was a despised collector of revenue, so as far as most people were concerned he was a sinner. These Pharisees knew that Jesus must have been aware of the type of man He was mixing with when He reclined at Levi's banqueting table. The door of Matthew's house seemed to have been left open for any to join in. But how could they, the Pharisees, permit themselves to join in the rejoicing for such an action would render them unclean? They, and any who taught in their synagogues, could never ever share a meal with bad people. Hence the Lord, who knew what they were thinking, came out with the definitive statement which ought to cause all of us to rejoice, "...I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

I once attended the funeral of a man whom I had known since I was a teenager. All those who took part in the service spoke of his Christian kindness and energetic support for such organisations as the Bible Society, Gideon's, missionary and welfare work in various African countries and Boys' Christian camps. Everything that was said about him confirmed my long-held opinion and deep respect in which I held him. So how strange it was when the man that had been charged with the responsibility for the actual funeral service began by saying that many people had said that we had come to remember a good man, whereas he would say that we were burying a bad and sinful man. It made us all sit up until he repeated Romans 3: 23-24:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

That verse was true for the entire congregation that day and it remains true for all of us today. I trust we are all well respected by our friends and neighbours, and looked upon as good citizens, yet we can never be good enough for God. However much we try we will always fall short because, as the Scripture says, we are all sinners. Certainly Levi, the tax collector, falls into this category.

I would judge that Levi was not unaware that he was considered a sinner by the Pharisees and contemptible, yet daily he grew richer, enabling him to enjoy a life style envied by not a few. Before he met the Lord, accumulating wealth seemed to be the criterion that governed his life. When the sound of the Lord's voice reached the ears and conscience of Levi, the prospect of further material prosperity faded, meaning that Matthew left everything in order to follow the Lord. As we have seen, this was a tremendous decision as it was a once-for-all action. There would be

no going back, as so lucrative was the task of tax-collecting that the post would soon be filled. I think that the great feast arranged by Matthew (Luke 5:29) when all his friends were invited was the swan song of his former life. Was he unashamedly announcing his allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth? He acknowledged that now he was a member of another company, where he was still despised by the Pharisees, but welcomed by the Friend of publicans and sinners.

This dramatic change in Levi's life-style is significant, for it demonstrates in actuality the truth and meaning of verse 32 of Luke 5, which we have quoted twice already, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." For the next minute or so I want to focus on the word "repentance", but before I do can I remind any who have just joined us that you are listening to a talk from *Truth for Today* entitled, "The Purpose of the Saviour." I want us now to consider repentance in its biblical context, not where a celebrity or politician uses the media to apologise and express their sorrow for some specific misdemeanour that would damage their career. I would suggest that on most occasions they are sorry only because they have been found out. Biblical repentance is a root and branch change in our thought, outlook and ultimately our direction. Never again will a repentant sinner think that he can perform acts of goodness that will earn merit with God, for he has turned his back upon works which previously he reckoned would make him good enough for God. There ought also to be recognition of the loathsome nature of sin, which must ever separate us from God, except that He has reached out in mercy and love to us. I trust that we have moved away from trusting our actions, however good we think they are, yet which are always stained with sin. Amongst the reasons, perhaps the main reason, for the incarnation and mission of the Lord Jesus, was to redeem us from the morass of sin. As the Apostle John wrote "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" 1 John 3:8. The main work of the devil is sin which, as we have seen, the Lord came to take away.

A hymn that my father used to sing and loved to sing states this truth:

God loved the world of sinners lost
And ruined by the Fall;
Salvation full, at highest cost,
He offers free to all.

E'en now by faith I claim Him mine,
The risen Son of God;
Redemption by His death I find,
And cleansing through the blood

Oh, 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,
The love of God to me!
It brought my Saviour from above,
To die on Calvary.

Those words were written by an American lady called Martha Stockton.

The only response when faced with such redeeming love is that of Job who repented in dust and ashes. From all that I have said up to this point, I trust it is clear that one of the purposes why the Lord came to this earth was to redeem us from our sinful state and make us aware that we can never be good enough for God.

The Apostle Paul was ever conscious of the great redeeming act of the Lord Jesus as we can learn from his first letter to Timothy chapter one and verse fifteen, to name but one source:

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

Note how Paul definitely stated that the purpose of the Lord's incarnation was to save sinners. Notice also, how Paul moves from the general to the specific, when he writes that, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" a wonderful statement in itself, but then he moves on to claim that he, the foremost sinner, had been shown mercy.

Later in the letter he returns to the thought of "ransom" or being redeemed:

"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" (1 Timothy chapter two and verses 3-6).

How precious and significant are the words of the Apostle Paul that, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This was now a trusted and accepted saying among the churches of Christ. Before the invention of the printing press, rote learning was a useful tool to store information that needed to be recalled. The saying recorded in verse fifteen of chapter one is a succinct summary of the gospel, easily remembered, easily recalled.

It used to be a custom, before lock-down interfered with our youth work, for the younger children to learn a verse from the Bible each month. When I was a child we used to have the Scriptural Alphabet, where we were encouraged to learn a text for every letter of the alphabet. I was never able to recall a text for every letter, yet I still remember "A is for: All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Such activities are similar to the "true and faithful sayings" recorded for us in Paul's first letter to Timothy.

Before we move on to conclude this broadcast by looking at another Scripture, I want to draw a further consequence from verse thirty-two of chapter five of Luke's Gospel, where the Lord stated that, "He had not come to call the righteous." It is easy to miss the implication of, "I did not come ..." a statement which must mean he had a place of dwelling before He came to this world.

Regarding this Leon Morris wrote:

"I did not come" points to his existence before he "came" to this world and sums up the essence of his mission. When he left his heavenly abode to come to earth, this was not to congratulate people like the Pharisees..."

It is the first part of that quote that I wish to emphasise. The Man, whose death and resurrection brought about our salvation, came to this world from His heavenly abode. In other words He is God incarnate, which we, at *Truth for Today* believe and preach, as do many other Christian preachers and ministers. We believe in the reality of God incarnate, not the myth of God incarnate. To believe in Jesus in the New Testament sense must include belief in His eternal being as the One who was there before creation. According to the Apostle John, in the prologue to his gospel, where he writes about Jesus,

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

I emphasise again that if we reject that statement we reject a truth that is at the very centre of the Christian gospel. It ever remains a mystery, yet we accept by faith, that He who is eternally pre-existent and uncreated was God incarnate in this world as the Man Christ Jesus. Truly Man, truly God.

Now, as I have already said, I wish to end our broadcast today by referring to another scripture, which can be found in John's Gospel. You might remember the title for this talk was The Purpose of the Saviour, so therefore I shall read John chapter ten and verse ten;

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it [more] abundantly."

I suggest that having the abundant life is the goal of all of us. When I was a teenager this attitude was summed up by Frankie Laine when he sang that he wanted, "...to live until he died, to laugh until he cried, to take the town and turn it upside down, and to live, live, live until he died." To live the full life is still my attitude, though I have a different view as to what the full life is. Now it is all to do with the abundant life offered to us by the Lord Jesus.

In order for us to have this salvation the Lord had to suffer at Calvary, a suffering expressed in a hymn written in 1868 by a Scottish lady, Elizabeth Clephane. I quote just a few lines:

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.

Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way,
That mark out the mountain's track?
They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the shepherd could bring him back.
Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?
They are pierced to night by many a thorn

But all through the mountains, thunder riven
And up from the rocky steep
There arose a cry to the gate of heaven,
Rejoice I have found My sheep!
And the angels echoed around the throne,
Rejoice for the Lord brings back His own!"

He came to redeem us and to give us life in the Spirit. Have you thanked Him for coming to redeem us? Have you taken up His offer of the abundant life?

May the Lord's blessing be upon our time together as I thank you for listening to this broadcast from *Truth for Today* numbered T1213 entitled The Purpose of the Saviour which was the first in the series of four talks on The Gospel of Christ.

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