

Luke Chapter 5

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[0 : 00] We're a bit international this morning.

We've folk from Kenya, which is great. Folk from Holland, lovely. A young man from Germany. And even some people from Nottingham. So we really are international this morning.

But we do welcome you all and trust that together we might know the Lord's blessing and presence. I wonder this morning, what do you think of God? What are your thoughts of him?

How would you describe him? Many people have attempted to. Many people like to tell us or to tell the world what they think of God. But the only true way that we can know what God is like is when he tells us what he is like.

Because he alone knows himself. And he has revealed himself to us. And he revealed himself to Moses. And this is what he said to Moses in Numbers 14 and verse 18.

[1 : 02] The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

This God that we come to worship this morning is the God who is abounding in love. Yet he is full of justice. We're going to sing together from our book 625.

Oh my soul, arise and bless your maker. For he is your master and your friend. And there again, repeating the scripture, slow to wrath, rich in tender mercy.

Worship the Saviour Jesus. Let's stand and sing 625. We're going to continue in our worship of God as we pray together.

So let us all pray. Amazing and glorious God in heaven, we thank you that you have made yourself known to us.

[2 : 05] We would never be able to find you out. We would never be able to understand you or know you accept that you've made yourself known. Thank you that you've made yourself known in creation, the world around about us, which shows such marvelous design and beauty and wonder.

And though this world is a world which is corrupted by sin and broken, so there is suffering and pain, so there is horror and unpleasantness, yet we thank you that still we see in this world the God who is creator.

We see that in our own lives as well, how you have made us and fashioned us as people, as human beings in your own image. You've given us hearts to love and we use them for hate.

You've given us minds to create and we've used them to destroy. But Lord, we thank you that still, when we look at the marvel of the human body and of the human character, we see again that we have been made by a good God, a great God.

But we thank you more than that, that you've not just left us ourselves and creation to work out what you're like, but you've come to us and spoken to us in your Son, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 19] We thank you that he is the full and complete radiance, the outshining, the representation of God on earth. Thank you that he chose to live as one of us, entering into the fullness of our humanity, apart from sin.

For he's the only one who lived that good, perfect, sinless life, that pleasing life to you. We thank you that in him we see what you are like, just as you've revealed yourself throughout history.

Yes, a God of loving kindness, a God who is slow to anger, a God of mercy and grace, yet a God who is just. Not a God who turns a blind eye to evil or wickedness, not a God who brushes these things under the carpet, but a God who faces and confronts them, a God who deals with them as they should be dealt with.

And Lord, we thank you that we are those who are deserving of that justice, deserving of that anger, deserving of that judgment. And yet in mercy and grace in Jesus, we thank you that he took the punishment and the blame and the judgment we deserve when he died in our place on the cross.

Thank you that all that we have done, which is contrary to your word, in thought and word and deed, was punished and dealt with there in the perfect and sinless Son of God.

[4 : 43] And it wasn't that he was unwilling. It wasn't that he went to the cross and died because he was forced to or made to or pressurized to by you. Thank you he went willingly and gladly. He went, Lord, out of love for us and love for you.

We thank you that now we have this wonderful way by which we can come to you, our God. We can come to you and know you as our Father and our friend. We can come to you and know you as our Redeemer, our Rescuer, our Savior.

We can know you as the one who loves us with everlasting love. And though we still sin and we still fail, we thank you, O Lord, there is full forgiveness for all our sins.

We're here this morning, O Lord, our God, because of Jesus, your Son, and because of you, our great God, and because of the Holy Spirit, who is God himself and who's come and made us new creations and lives within us and has opened our blind eyes and taken away the cloud from our minds and softened our stony hearts.

We thank you, O Lord, that we are here because of you. And we're here to meet with you and commune with you and fellowship with you. And we're here to bring you our praises and our thanks.

[5 : 55] And we're here to hear you speak to us again through your word, the Bible, which you've given us, that we might know you better and enjoy you more. O come, Lord, we pray, and be present with us now in this time and grant us that real sense of meeting with you and knowing your blessing.

Whoever we are, whatever our background situation, wherever we've come from this morning, Lord, we are here because you are here. And we long again, O Lord, that we might, at the end of this time, be able to say how good it's been to be in fellowship with God.

We ask these things and bring our prayers to you now. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let's turn together in our Bibles to Luke in chapter 5.

Continuing our journey through this history of the life of our Lord Jesus by Luke, who was told at the very start of his record that he'd very carefully investigated everything and wrote down accurately.

So we're going to read from chapter 5 of Luke. If you've got one of the red Bibles, like this one, that's page 1032. Page 1032.

[7 : 15] And we're going to begin at verse 12, which is near the bottom right, left-hand corner. And read through to verse 32. So in verse 12 through to verse 32.

And here is something more of the life of the Lord Jesus. While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.

When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

I am willing, he said. Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priests and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them.

Yet the news about him spread all the more so that crowds of people came to hear him and be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

[8 : 23] One day, Jesus was teaching and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They'd come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem and the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill.

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. But when they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, Friend, your sins are forgiven. children, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, Who is this fellow who's speaking blasphemy?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk?

But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralyzed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

[9 : 37] Immediately, he stood up in front of them, took what he'd been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, We have seen remarkable things today.

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. And Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 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? Jesus answered them, It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And we'll look at that, those stories and events, in a few moments' time. I think if you could have your Bible open to Luke in chapter 5 and to the verses we read there, verses 12 through to 32.

[10 : 54] When you become a Christian, there's many wonderful answers, as it were, to the questions of life that you discover, that you understand for the first time. But also there are many puzzling questions as well that remain.

In fact, more puzzling questions, in fact, increase as you become a Christian. One of those real questions, one of the hard questions, one of the struggling questions for the believer is this, why doesn't everybody want to become a Christian?

Why doesn't everybody want to enter into the joy, the fullness, the grace, the goodness, the love of God? Why do people not become Christians when they hear the gospel? Why is it that they're resistant?

Such good news. It just doesn't seem to make sense, does it? There's three possible reasons. There's many others as well. I just want to put forward three possible reasons why somebody may say I'm not going to become a Christian or has not become a Christian.

First of all, they may say, well, I know that if I become a Christian, I could get mocked or ridiculed, poked fun at by my work colleagues or schoolmates or family even or friends.

[12 : 02] I don't know if I can put up with people being unpleasant towards me because I've become a Christian. I'd rather just keep everybody happy. Second reason that somebody might say I don't want to become a Christian is, well, I'd have to give up so many things that I actually enjoy.

You know, I enjoy my sins. I enjoy my bad habits. I enjoy being able to do what I want. I wouldn't be able to lie anymore or compromise anymore or do things just to, again, keep people happy.

It would spoil my life as I live it now. I'd have to be different. Third reason I've got here is, and I think it's a genuine reason for some people, certainly why they don't become Christians, is I'd never keep it up.

It seems to be impossible to keep on living the Christian life. It's such a, to live such a good life, a God-pleasing life, I'm bound to fail, I'm bound to mess it up, I'm bound to muck and fall down flat on my face.

I don't want to start something that I don't think I can finish. Now, of course, there are many other reasons why people become, do not become Christians or do not respond to the gospel.

[13 : 20] Many reasons why people don't become disciples of Jesus and follow him, not just the ones I've mentioned. But I want to respond to those three in particular by looking at these people that we meet with in chapter 5.

We've already seen that Jesus has been drawing people to himself. He's already got his first few disciples. We looked at that last week at the end of verse 11. So they, that's Simon and Andrew and James and John, pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed him.

These are the first disciples, the first ones who responded to Jesus' call to follow him, to be his disciple and did so. And that theme of discipleship is what we carry on into in the next few chapters as well.

In one sense, this whole book of Luke is about why we should become a disciple of Jesus, why we should follow him, why we should put our trust in him, why we should become a Christian. And so I want us to meet three more people who meet Jesus and have faith in Jesus and witness Jesus' transformation in their lives.

And each of these people, I believe, answers those three reasons I gave for refusing to follow him. Each one gives a very powerful reason why we must put our faith in Jesus, why we should trust in him, why we should be his disciple.

[14 : 44] And the first reason we find is in the man we read about from verses 12 to 16. The first reason that we should become a disciple of Jesus is because of fellowship.

Fellowship. If you don't know what that word means, I'll unpack it a little bit as well. All we know about this man is that he was covered with leprosy. Now, it may not have been the leprosy that we recognize as a modern, still, sadly, a terrible affliction amongst people in many parts of the world.

It may have just been that he had a terrible eczema, but he had some sort of skin complaint, disease, may have been leprosy, but he's covered with it head to toe, we might say. Luke's the only one who tells us he was covered with leprosy.

He was the doctor, remember, so he was very careful about medical terms and medical explanations. But it meant this, that this man was an outcast from his community. It meant that this man was rejected by the people.

He could have no contact with anybody, whether it be his family, his friends. He couldn't work, of course. He couldn't feed himself or clothe himself or care for himself.

[15 : 54] He was totally reliant upon the charity of others. The only people he could have anything to do with were other lepers, other people who were in the same condition. Until he was cleansed, completely cleansed, until he was completely healed, if he ever could be, he was forever excluded.

Excluded from every, human relationship, but also excluded from God. He wasn't allowed to go into the temple in Jerusalem and offer the sacrifices others could. He wasn't allowed to go into the synagogue as Jesus had done and taught and heard the word of God.

He was completely outside, completely alone in that sense. But this man, whose name we don't know, but he's covered with leprosy, he hears, somehow he hears people talking maybe at a distance about this Jesus, this healer, this miracle worker, and that he was in the area.

And so, he comes seeking out this Jesus and asks him to make him clean. We don't know how close he came to Jesus, whether he stood at a distance and called out, if you're willing, Lord, you can make me clean.

But he falls on his face, an act of submission, an act of worship in one sense. He really believes Jesus can heal him. Notice what he says, you can make me clean.

[17 : 12] He's got faith. From what he's heard about Jesus, he's got faith to believe that Jesus can do something for him and heal him. But perhaps Jesus won't.

Perhaps Jesus doesn't want to heal him. Perhaps Jesus will say, go away. Perhaps Jesus is unwilling. She says, if you're willing, if you want to.

There's a complete submission in that sense, isn't it, to Jesus. And Jesus does want to. Notice this. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

That immediately made Jesus, in the eyes of the religious establishment, unclean. That made Jesus an undesirable as well by touching him. But this man who probably had known no physical contact for years upon years, nobody would dare touch him or come near to him.

even other lepers. Here's Jesus. He touches him. There's physical contact that's made with him. He says, I am willing. I want to make you clean. Be clean.

[18 : 14] And simply with that word and that touch, this man, we're told, is immediately cleansed of his leprosy. It's not a gradual healing through medication. And we thank God for the medication we have.

This is clearly a miracle, a powerful miracle. This man, all his skin, all his ailments, all his, whatever it is, he's been in contact with his garment.

And so Jesus says, don't tell anyone. Go, show yourself to the priest, offer the sacrifices. Moses is commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them. According to the law, the Old Testament law, anyone who was a leper or had a skin complaint in that sense that separated them from the community, when they were healed, they would have to go and show themselves to the priest.

The priest would examine them and they would offer sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for their healing and then they could be returned in the community. They could be returned to normal life. They would return to their family, return to their work, return to the synagogue.

The truth is that if you become a Christian, there will be some alienation. If you become a Christian, there will be some people who will mock you and ridicule you. Some people who will treat you as an outsider, they will cut you off from various parties or events.

[19 : 36] Yes, even your family perhaps will think less of you. But the reality is this, that when you become a disciple of Jesus, you are brought into a new fellowship, fellowship of God's people, into a new family, the church, and especially you're brought into a living, dynamic, joyful relationship with God himself.

That's the wonderful good news of being a Christian. Here's how Paul describes what happens in Ephesians 2, 19. Consequently, he says, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

You see, because of our sin, we are separated from God. We are cut off and alienated from him. But through Jesus Christ, we are brought into his embrace. We are brought into the experience of his love.

We are brought into his family. All because of Jesus. This is what he says earlier on in Ephesians 2. Now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Jesus Christ.

it's worth the sacrifice of people, of their friendship, of their popularity, acceptance.

[21 : 06] acceptance. It's worth it because you're brought into a better fellowship, better friendships. And the relationships that we have within the local church are an expression of the relationship we have with all God's people throughout the world.

Fellowship. Do you feel outside? Feel alienated? In Jesus, we become brought into a family. The second thing, and we look at that in the next event, the next person, the second thing and the second reason why we must and should become a Christian is because of forgiveness.

Forgiveness. Again, this second man we know little about. We only know him by his illness once more. We're told in verse 18, some men came carrying a paralyzed man.

This man had friends. Unlike the leper, he had good friends. Friends who cared for him. They too had heard about Jesus, no doubt.

The news we're told, hadn't we, even in verse 15, had spread all the more around about Jesus, this healer, how he'd heal the leprous man. And you can imagine these friends talking together and saying, well, you know, Philip, perhaps Jesus could heal Philip.

[22 : 26] I'm just making up his name, imagining his name is Philip. Wouldn't that be wonderful? We've heard about it. Let's go and take him. Let's put him on a stretcher. Let's take him all of his friends. They find Jesus.

They find him in a building, in a house. The trouble is that everybody else wanted to be in the house, including some of these religious leaders. They'd come some distance from Judea and Jerusalem in the south to hear about this miracle worker and his teaching.

And so they couldn't get in, but they were determined. Absolutely determined that they had to see Jesus and they had to bring their friend to Jesus. So what do they do?

They climb on the roof. In those days, maybe you've seen them in Middle East houses, had a set of steps on the outside which went onto a flat roof. And so they do that.

They take him up the steps, the outside of the building, and they make what must have been a pretty huge hole. You imagine a man of maybe six foot or whatever, five foot ten, and there's his stretcher and they've got to lower him down on ropes and it's a big hole in the roof.

[23 : 28] We're not told what the owner of the house thought about it. Probably wasn't none too plus. But anyway, they lower him down and he lands right in front of Jesus.

It's obvious, isn't it? It's pretty obvious what he wants. It's pretty obvious what they want Jesus to do. It's pretty obvious what they believe Jesus can do as well. They wouldn't have gone to so much trouble if they didn't have this faith.

In fact, Jesus points out their faith. They want Jesus to heal him. They want their paralyzed friend to get up and walk and be the old friend he was. We don't know what happened to him, whether it was an accident or an illness, but they want him restored.

And so Jesus, as he sees their faith, what does he say? Friend, your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven? We're not told how the man responded.

We aren't told how the friends responded. But we are told about the religious people, how they responded, the Pharisees and the teachers. They began to think amongst themselves, who is this fellow?

[24 : 33] He's speaking blasphemy for who can forgive sins but God alone. He's only a man. He's acting like he's God.

All sin, of course, is against God. We often think of sin only in the context that it's against one another.

It's when we lie to one another or cruel to one another, hurt one another, abusive, or whatever it may be. We think of it or steal from one another. But actually, of course, sin is ultimately, firstly and primarily against God.

God is the God who has set up his law, his way of life for us. When we break those commandments, when we break his law, then we are sinning against him by denying him that rightful place of being the Lord of our lives, by denying him that rightful place as being the one who calls the shots in our lives.

And if sin is against God, which it surely is, therefore, only God can forgive that wrong. It's not like if somebody wrongs you, I can't forgive them.

[25 : 37] Only you can forgive them. And if we sin against God and wrong him, only he can forgive us. Makes sense, doesn't it? But Jesus answers their accusation, their misunderstanding, by healing the man of his paralysis.

And so providing the proof that he has the authority, the power from God, not only to heal, but also to forgive. I want you to know that the Son of Man, one of his ways of referring to himself, has authority on earth to forgive sins.

And so he said to the paralyzed man, tell you to get up, take your mat, and go home. Immediately he stood up. Again, it's an immediate thing. He doesn't massage his back, as it were, because there was some, it slipped a disc, or whatever it may be, but he speaks, simply, get up, and he gets up.

And as the man walks out the house, his mat, as it were, over his shoulder, or under his arm, whatever it was, he goes away praising God. And all the people, his friends included, do the same, praising God.

Why are they praising God? Because they recognize that here in their midst was one who was doing the very work of God. Here is the one who is acting with God's power.

[26 : 57] The one that they said, who is this fellow? But it raises that question again. The man needed to be healed of his paralysis, but Jesus, firstly and primarily, forgives him his sin.

And what is he saying? What is the Bible telling us? What do we understand? This, that the greatest need we can have, whoever we are, is for forgiveness from God. No matter how terrible life may be, no matter what problems or distresses or troubles, even total paralysis, no matter what state we are in physically and, or mentally even, or emotionally, the greatest need we have is forgiveness of sin.

You see, the problem, the reality is this, whatever physical disability, whatever physical problem or difficulty we're going through in life, it is temporary and it's physical.

It's physical and it's temporary. But the problem of sin is that it's both spiritual and eternal. Yes, our physical problems, our physical difficulties affect our relationships with one another.

They may prevent us from working. They may prevent us from enjoying the things of life. They may stop us from doing the things that other people can do because we have that problem or difficulty or whatever it may be.

[28 : 18] but sin disrupts our relationship with God. It breaks our relationship with God. It alienates us from God. It makes us strangers to God and more than that, it ruins the enjoyment of the blessings that God wants us to have.

Likewise, those physical problems we have, those difficulties, no matter how painful and horrible they are and for some people I know they really are horrible, ultimately they must come to an end.

An illness passes and we get better. The problem that we're in, the difficulty, financial or whatever it may be, unemployment or whatever, that passes. But ultimately, even if we are ill all our lives, even if we struggle with difficulties all our lives, ultimately they must start when we die.

We don't carry illness or problems or troubles into the grave. But sin will never leave us alone. We find that sin will follow us into the next world beyond death where we shall face God's judgment and eternal punishment.

So the greatest need, even if it doesn't seem to us immediately to be the most important need, is that our sins are forgiven. Above all else, that's why we must become a follower and a disciple of Jesus.

[29 : 48] We must put our faith and trust in him because our sin must be forgiven. That's why Jesus, at the end of the passage he read, verse 32, said, I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

That's his primary reason. He didn't come to heal the leper primarily or to raise the paralyzed man necessarily. As he goes on to raise people from the dead or even to teach, he came particularly especially to call people to repentance.

You and I. And then we have one more person, don't we? The leper teaches us that when we come to Christ we have fellowship. We are brought into a new family.

The second one teaches us that we have forgiveness for our sins. People say, well I don't know whether I want to become a Christian. I've got to give up my sins, my bad habits.

Let me say this to you. Your sins and your bad habits are what ruins your life, not what makes your life enjoyable. They may be a passing moment of pleasure, a Saturday night drunk out of your skull but in the morning the hangover you've got tells you this was not a good idea.

[31 : 02] Jesus wants to forgive our sins and deal with the problem of sin because actually the problem of sin is the thing that ruins, destroys relationships. We've seen that, we know that.

We're not stupid. We know that living selfishly with pride, with greed and all these things is that which destroys.

So why on earth do you want to keep living that way with your sins? Better to bring them to Jesus and no forgiveness. The third reason we should become a Christian we find in this third person, this third person who meets with Jesus and that is because of fulfillment.

Fulfillment. Now, this time we get to know the name of the man. His name's Levi. He also had another name, Matthew. We know that because in Matthew's account, in the gospel we call Matthew, we have this same story and his name is Matthew.

Like many people, as you've come across them in the Bible, they often had two names, Simon and Peter, Saul and Paul. And so, Matthew, Levi, he's the disciple who went on to write that book, that gospel, which tells about how he became a follower of Jesus.

[32 : 22] And we know something more about him, we know his job. And like the other two, he was able to work, he worked as a tax collector. And it was while he was at work, sat at his booth, his temporary office, and once there's his mobile office in the town, that Jesus approaches him and speaks to him, follow me.

He's calling him to be a disciple, calling him to put his faith and trust in him. And Levi, we're told, got up there and then, left everything and followed him. Now, during this time, Rome, the Roman Empire, ruled over Judea, ruled over this country.

And like every government, they liked to collect taxes, but they didn't want their soldiers collecting taxes, they basically subcontracted the work out to local people to collect the taxes and then pay them into the central government.

And like all governments, they taxed just about everything. They taxed everything that was produced, all goods, all livestock, all crops, you name it, there was a tax for it.

It's not been any different, dear friends. We may think it's new today, but it's not. And it was the job of the tax collector to set up his booth in the town and to collect those taxes from everybody who owed them.

[33 : 41] However, nearly all the tax collectors, if not all of them, were corrupt, put it that way. They were always on the lookout for the backhander.

They would either skim off some of the taxes and sort of make a change in the notes instead of somebody paying a pound, as it were, they'd pay 50p or whatever.

And then they were also a bit corrupt, so when a businessman would come and he'd got a big tax bill to pay, they would say, well, you haven't really got all that much. You've got less, half those crops, half those produce, but just pay me a little backhander and I'll put in half a tax account.

And so they were universally hated, hated by the people who had to pay the tax because they often would bribe or steal from them. They were hated as well because they were working for the occupying forces, the Romans who were despised.

They were not popular people. And so Levi is there, he's collecting the taxes about his business and Jesus walks up to him, Levi, follow me.

[34 : 49] And he immediately leaves his job, leaves his occupation, leaves behind his work. Now we know that this was, for Levi, a joyful experience, something that he found exciting because immediately we're told, verse 29, he throws a great party.

Throws a great party for Jesus at his own house and invites all of his friends. They would have just been tax collectors, we're told, and general riffraff and people that were the undesirables of the town.

He brings them all because he wants them to hear about Jesus and to meet with Jesus for themselves. They're obviously people who are not very well liked because the Pharisees speak of them and says, sinners, tax collectors and sinners, they were people who didn't keep God's law as they did, undesirables.

Something's changed, hasn't it? Levi is left behind a life of corruption, a life of selfishness. He's begun a new life as a disciple of Jesus.

One of the best ways that the Bible describes becoming a disciple or follower of Jesus is it talks about having new life or a new life. Romans chapter 6, we too live a new life.

[36 : 14] The Bible uses other expressions but it's always about something new, new creation, new birth, a new beginning. And this new life that Levi enters into has two very clear blessings, two clear benefits, two clear things that people are looking for themselves, people are seeking for themselves.

First of all, he's got a new purpose, a new purpose. He no longer lives for money, he no longer lives for wealth, for possessions, for materials.

Now he lives to tell other people about Jesus. We've seen that with the party he throws here. But also because we know that he goes on to spend the remainder of his life telling people about Jesus.

One of those apostles like Peter and Andrew and so on. he writes the New Testament gospel of Matthew so that people, more and more people can read and get to know and find out about Jesus.

He's got a purpose which is worth living for, something which is fulfilling, something which is not small-minded and self-centered but vast and big.

[37 : 29] He's part of the purposes of God, the plan of God. He's engaged with this great work that God has begun. What about you?

What's your purpose in life? What are you living for? Living for your family? That's good.

Are you living for your career? Are you living for a dream that you've got in the future? Are you living for yourself?

None of those purposes, none of those reasons for living are anything like the purpose that Levi had for living or the Christian has for living. And we can love our families and care for them and live for Christ and we can do our jobs well and achieve great things in this world living for Christ.

None of those things stop us from doing that but when we live selfishly, small-mindedly, introspectively, we're not living for anything, are we? Because ultimately we're going to die.

[38 : 41] We're just living and biding our time, passing through, trying to get to the end. The second thing we find about Levi is this.

Not only has he a purpose but it seems very clear he has a new enjoyment of life. A new enjoyment of life. As I said, he throws this great party. This is the happiest day of his life for many people here who are Christians they can point back and say, the happiest day of my life was when Christ became my Lord and Master, when I became a disciple of him, when I met with him and discovered him.

That was the happiest day of my life and it doesn't end there. Like the other disciples, Matthew, Levi, goes on to spend three years with Jesus, learning more, seeing more, experiencing more of Jesus' wonder and greatness.

And even when Jesus was crucified and put to death and then rose again, Levi didn't stop enjoying the relationship with Jesus but by the Holy Spirit continued to know and to live.

He was enabled to live life to the full just as Jesus had promised in John chapter 10. I've come that they may have life and have it to the full. And even when Levi died and left this world, he entered into the perfect fullness of life when he entered into the presence of God in heaven for eternity.

[40 : 11] Every step of the way it was increasing blessing, getting better and better, greater and greater. Paul the Apostle could save for me to live is Christ, to die is gain, not loss.

How is it possible for Levi to see it through to the end because he had new life? You may say, well I can't start the Christian life, I can't, I'm afraid if I start I won't finish.

That's what putting your faith in Jesus is all about, putting your trust in him. No, you can't. You won't be able to live the Christian life. None of us can in our own strength or ability or trust in our own goodness or righteousness.

We can only live the Christian life and will live the Christian life and will persevere to the end because Jesus lives with us, because he inhabits, because he is one with us, because his power, his strength that heals the leper, that raises the paralyzed is that same power that works in us to believe, to trust, to follow.

So let me ask you, what good reason have you got for not following Jesus? Is it really a good reason? It may be a good excuse.

[41 : 29] Oh, we can always find excuses, but is it a good reason not to follow him? Does it really add up the cost of possibly losing friendships and relationships of people poking fun at you?

Are you really that concerned? Isn't it better to be important to the embrace of God and the family and fellowship and the love of God's people?

What about those sins that you keep hold of, those selfish desires, those things? Do they really make you happy all the time? Passing pleasure, maybe, passing high, really, don't they ruin things?

Don't they empty your pockets of hard-earned cash? Don't they actually cause arguments and break-ups? Don't they actually spoil life?

Wouldn't it be better to bring them and ask for forgiveness because they've separated you from God and put your trust in that love of God which forgives sin? Aren't you looking for purpose?

[42 : 35] Aren't we all looking, why were I here? Why was I born? What is it about? God, we were made for God. You were made by God and for God. You were made by God and he sent his son into the world so that you could know him.

He suffered and died in your place and rose again that you might have new life, full life. Whatever you're dreaming of, whatever you're hoping for, whatever you're living for, it will always, sounds pessimistic, disappoint.

If you've lived long enough, you know that. People will let us down. We'll let ourselves and others down. Isn't the fullness of life Christ offers, gives, worth trusting him for?

Let me finally close just to those of us who are believers, those of us who are Christians. Are you making the most of the fellowship that God's brought you into? He's brought you into the church family.

Are you making the most of it? Are you enjoying that family, that fellowship? Are you sharing and serving and spending time together as much as you possibly can because it is so good?

[43 : 50] Are you daily giving up your sin? Repentance is not simply about saying no to sin once and turning to Christ. It's a daily life.

Or are you allowing those temptations, those things that draw you away from Christ, to get in the way and to spoil? And let me finally ask you, dear friend, dear Christian, are you living a new life, a life different to those around about you, a life different to the life you lived before?

Is your life marked with that reality that you've got up and you're following Jesus? Let me urge you, if you're not a Christian, to come to Jesus, come and seek him, come and ask, Lord, I want to be your disciple, I want to follow you.

And let me urge you, dear Christian, to make the most of all that Christ has done for you and make the most of the blessings and the joy that he has won for you.

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[45 : 01] it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Jesus Christ.

Amen.