

CALLED: Luke 5:1-11, 27-32; 6:12-16

Into Story: How and when were you called to follow Jesus Christ? I enjoy reading testimonies. When you talk with me you will likely hear me ask, "Tell me your story. How did you become a Christian?" It's like my other favorite question. I like to ask married couples, "Tell me how you met?" I like to tell people how I met my wife, Sandie. How does a boy from a small town in Western Pennsylvania meet a girl from big city Hong Kong? I like to tell people how I met Jesus; that is, how he called me to follow him.

Simon Called: Luke 5:1-11

Simon Peter listened to Jesus' teaching in the synagogue. Jesus went to Simon's house and healed his mother-in-law. Jesus rebuked her fever. The virus or infection causing the fever left her body and she arose and made dinner. Many other sick people came to Simon's house in the evening and Jesus laid his hands on them and healed them. Simon also saw Jesus rebuke and cast out demons. He heard the demons say, "You are the Son of God!" Simon witnessed all of this. Simon thought about all of this. Simon continued fishing.

One day Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee). Fishermen were cleaning their nets after fishing all night. Jesus got into Simon's boat and taught the people. When Jesus was done teaching he said to Simon, "Let's go fishing." Peter had been fishing all night and caught nothing. He was tired, but he said, "But at your word I will sail out to the deep part of the lake and let down the nets." Simon was obedient. Simon had already seen what Jesus could do with a word. Jesus' word had authority. With a word Jesus rebuked fever. With a word Jesus drove out demons. Here's my paraphrase of what Peter said, "I'm tired. I'm frustrated. But I've seen what your word can do, so I will obey and drop the nets."

Simon Peter caught so many fish the nets were breaking. James and John were in a boat nearby and came to help. I also imagine Jesus helping to pull in the nets. When all the fish were in the boat and the boat was so heavy it sat at water level, Simon was astonished! Simon looked at the fish. Then he looked at Jesus. In the presence of Jesus, Peter felt Jesus' holiness and conviction of his sins. "Go away from me," he said, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This is true conversion. When we experience true conversion, we react to the holiness of Christ and repent of our sins.

Simon could've used Jesus to make a successful business. He could've said, "Jesus, I have an idea. We should be business partners and make a lot of money. I will do the labor and you can do whatever you just did to find the schools of fish. We can have a very successful fishing company."

No. Something unexpected happened. Simon Peter felt his sinfulness and left his fishing business to follow Christ. Why was Simon overcome with a sense of his sinfulness? Simon heard the demons call Jesus the "holy Son of God" and saw Jesus heal his sick mother-in-

law. Simon didn't feel the weight of it all until Jesus demonstrated his authority over something personal and something he knew to be impossible. *(An equivalent might be an agnostic oncologist, cancer doctor, who has never seen a terminally ill cancer patient survive and a Christian prays for one in Jesus' name, rebukes the cancer, and the cancer patient is healed. The healed patient gives his testimony. That would have special convincing power for an agnostic oncologist.)* Jesus really got Simon's attention when he demonstrated his authority not just in religious matters, but over fish.

* Story from Bibles for Mideast. Jesus got Simon Peter's attention with a miracle catch of fish, something related to his life's experience. Jesus got a Muslim terrorist's attention when an old woman pleaded with him and Jesus appeared to him in a dream.

Jesus told Peter, "Sail out into the deep of the lake and let down your nets and you will catch fish." Peter responded, "Master, we fished all night and didn't catch anything. But because you're asking I will do it." "Master" in GR is *epistatas* = someone who has authority in a certain area and who has the right to give orders. Peter recognized Jesus' authority as a teacher, an authority in religious matters, and a prophet with miraculous power to heal. When Jesus demonstrated his authority over nature and fish in the sea, Peter responded differently. Peter said, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." "Lord" in GR is *kuprios*. Peter was awakened to the fact that Jesus was more than a religious expert, more than a mere man. He realized Jesus is Lord over all creation and therefore he must be God and God is holy. Peter was awakened to the holiness of Christ.

Peter said, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." I consider Peter's calling as his conversion. This is true conversion. When we experience true conversion, we react to the holiness of Christ and repent of our sins. People will admit to not being perfect and making a few mistakes. That's not conversion. True conversion requires an awakening to the holiness of God and our sinfulness and need for forgiveness. Something about this miracle awakened Peter to the holiness of Christ and his own sinfulness. Jesus demonstrated mastery over something Peter thought he knew and could do better than Jesus. That humbled him and awakened him to the holiness of Jesus.

Jesus said (my paraphrase), "I can make you successful catching fish, but I have a higher calling for you. I will make you successful catching people for the Kingdom of God."

We are called to be fishers of people, not keepers of an aquarium.

What happened with all the fish? My guess is Simon sold all the fish, paid off his mortgage and loan for his fishing boat, put some in a bank account for his wife and mother-in-law, and gave the rest to support Jesus' mission and himself as a disciple. (Gave it to Judas was the group's treasurer.)

Levi Called: Luke 5:27-32

“After *this* Jesus went out of the house and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.”

This is a very brief description of Levi’s calling. We can use sanctified imagination to know what happened prior to Levi’s calling. After *this* refers to the healing of the paralytic man: Luke 5:17-26. Perhaps Levi’s tax booth was just across the street from the house where this event happened. Levi saw and heard it all. He watched the men make a hole in the roof and lower the paralytic to Jesus. Levi heard Jesus forgive the paralytic’s sins. He heard Jesus question the Pharisees. He heard Jesus command, “Rise and walk.” He saw the former paralytic walk out of the house carrying his bed and glorifying God. Levi was seized with amazement by the miracle. When Jesus left the house, Levi was sitting right there. Their eyes met. Levi felt shame for his sin, his greed.

Levi was waiting to be called but didn’t think he was worthy because everyone hated him. He collected taxes for the Romans in Capernaum. He had probably already witnessed Jesus’ word that had authority to deliver from demons and heal diseases. He had probably already heard some of Jesus’ teaching about the values of the kingdom of God. He probably thought, “I’m a tax collector. He would never call me to follow.” But then Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic man and healed him right across the street. Then Jesus walked right up to his tax booth and looked him in the eyes. Then Levi heard the words he never thought he would hear – “Levi, follow me.”

Luke gave a detailed description of the events prior to Peter conversion and calling. He doesn’t do that with Levi. Why not? What’s important to Luke is what happens after Levi’s conversion and calling. He gave up his money and power. Levi had a dinner party for all his tax collector and sinner friends. He celebrated his call to follow Jesus. He was unashamed of Christ. He wanted all his tax collector and sinner friends to personally meet Jesus because they probably wouldn’t have any other opportunity to meet Jesus.

Jesus didn’t compromise his message when he had dinner with the tax collectors and sinners. There’s a temptation to compromise the truth. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” I think Jesus told them what John the Baptist told tax collectors who responded to his baptism of repentance. Luke 3:12-13: *Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to John, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And John said to them, ‘Collect no more than you are authorized to do.’*” Levi eventually wrote the beautiful and powerful gospel of Matthew.

I like to hang around righteous people and avoid our society’s sinners. Who do we consider the “tax collectors and sinners” in our society or culture to avoid? Can you imagine Jesus

going to a dinner party with them? There are certainly some notorious sinners just waiting to repent and receive Christ. There are people you and I would look at and think, “That person would never repent and receive Christ.”

* Sometimes we don't want to go where the tax collectors and sinners are. We prefer our close friends and comfort zones. I read a story about a pastor in Iran had a Bible study in his home. Iranian secret police broke into his home, arrested him, and put him in prison. He shared his faith with Muslim prisoners. The guards ordered him to stop. He didn't stop so he was moved to another part of the prison. He didn't stop and was finally moved to the harshest part of the prison known as Hell. Hell was the prison's basement with 200 drug addicts and violent prisoners who were awaiting hanging. Murders happened every week. The pastor was put in a cell with a heroin drug addict. The heroin addict was awaiting execution by hanging. The pastor witnessed to the heroin addict, he received Christ, and was miraculously delivered from his addiction. The guards supplied the addicts with heroin to keep them hooked. The pastor was eventually released. Before the pastor was released from prison he had to sign a document that stated if he was caught again leading a Bible study in his home he would be imprisoned for life. The pastor moved out of Iran to another safe country. When the guards and prison warden saw the former addict with a sane mind and no longer hooked on heroin, he was released. He also left Iran and joined the pastor's Bible study fellowship in another safe country. The point: The hopeless drug addicted sinner would never have been saved if God didn't send that pastor to Hell. The Iranian pastor later admitted that his time in prison humbled him and made him more obedient to Christ – to go wherever and to whomever Christ wanted him to be a witness to. God may force us to go where the “tax collectors and sinners” are.

Applications

First, two sovereign actions precede calling. Romans 8:28-30: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are **called according to his purpose**. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also **called**, and those whom he **called** he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

We are foreknown. We are loved before we are born. Before a husband and wife conceive a child (or adopt) they determine to love that child. Sandie and I agreed to love our children before each one was conceived. We will love this child no matter how the child is born, how the child grows and matures, and what choices he/she makes as an adult. Each child is a gift from Father God. We are foreknown – foreloved by God.

We are predestined. God knew and loved us so much he gave us a destiny. We have a purpose before we're conceived and born – to become conformed to the image of Jesus

Christ. God the Father wants sons and daughters that think and act, love and obey, like his Son, Jesus Christ.

Foreknowledge and predestination are actions of God's sovereign grace in eternity past. Meditate on God's foreknowledge and predestination of you and worship him! I enjoy going to the desert and looking into the night sky and seeing the Milky Way stretching across the darkness and thinking about how God loved me before I was born.

We are then called. We are called to fulfill the purpose of God's foreknowledge and predestination which is to become conformed to the likeness of Christ.

This calling is referred to in theology as an "effectual calling"; that is, it is the work of God's Spirit convincing us of our sin and our need for righteousness in Christ alone: John 16:7-11. I refer to this as 'conversional calling.' If you are foreknown and predestined by God then you will respond to the call. It is effectual; that is, it's effective. It works. You hear it, feel it, and respond to it. It is followed by justification and eventual glorification according to Romans 8:30.

Foreknowledge and predestination are from eternity past. Glorification is future. Calling is present; it is an event that takes place in time. It is a historical event. It involves the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and the need for righteousness. My calling came while watching a Billy Graham crusade on TV. Prior to that calling I was foreknown and predestined by a loving Heavenly Father. My wife, Sandie's calling, came when she went to college in Ottawa, Canada, and a friend invited her to a C&MA church. She heard the gospel and believed... the first member of her family to believe. She is number 6 out of 7. Before Sandie's calling she was foreknown and predestined by a loving Heavenly Father.

I equate calling with conversion. We are not converted until we are convicted of our sins and receive Christ as Savior from sin. This is what happened to Simon when he said, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man."

Second, I see two dimensions of a biblical "calling" – conversional and vocational.

The conversional call is a call preceded by foreknowledge and predestination. It is a call to repent of sin and receive Christ as Savior and Lord and follow him. After our *conversional calling*, we all have a general and specific *vocational calling* from Jesus.

The vocational calling is a call to serve. It has general and specific applications.

- General vocational calling: be a witness for Christ. We are all called to be fishers of people.
- Specific vocational calling: where, when, and how to be a witness for Christ. What is your spiritual gift and area of service – pastor, teacher, evangelist, missionary, youth

leader, children's worker - AWANA, or whatever you do the support the church and Christ's Great Commission.

When we are called by Jesus it isn't how we can use Jesus to get what we want, but how can we serve him to do what he wants. We don't respond with a selfish attitude. If Peter said to Jesus, "Let's start a fishing business together! You find the fish and I'll throw the nets," then that would be a sel-*fish* attitude. We don't use Jesus. Jesus uses us. Jesus calls us to salvation and service for his kingdom.

President John Kennedy's famous 1961 quote: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." Christian version: "Ask not what Jesus (your church) can do for you – ask what you can do for Jesus (your church)."

Simon and Levi experienced Christ's conversion call. Their testimonies are recorded for us in Luke. They both fulfilled their vocational calling to be apostles, and their names were changed to Peter and Matthew – their apostolic names (Luke 6:12-16).

Saul became Paul. Paul described his conversional and vocational calling by God: Galatians 1:15: *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.* Paul's calling; that is, the moment God "was pleased to reveal his Son to me," is described in Acts 9.

Paul had a specific vocational calling to be an apostle. Romans 1:1, 7: *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, **called to be an apostle** (vocational), set apart for the gospel of God... To all those in Rome who are loved by God and **called to be saints** (conversional): Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Are you being obedient to Christ and fulfilling your vocational call?

Are you certain of your conversional calling? We must each have our own conversion call from Christ. It doesn't need to be dramatic; it just needs to be real and you know it's real. You can recall it as a historical event. You can share it with others who don't know Christ. I don't have a dramatic conversional calling, but I have had the opportunity to share my testimony several times with prisoners in Taiwan. When I asked for a response, a hand over the heart and repeat a sinner's prayer, at least 50% responded out of 150 inmates.

Jesus calls people to follow him out of different life situations. Simon was a hard working fisherman. He had fished all night and caught nothing. He was tired. Discouraged. He had a sick mother-in-law at home. But Simon saw Jesus' authority over sickness and nature – two things Peter couldn't control. Jesus calls people out of desperate life situations. Levi had an entirely different life situation. Levi was a wealthy businessman. He made himself rich

collecting taxes. But his success and money didn't satisfy. He had an empty soul. Levi saw Jesus forgive sins and heal the sick. When Jesus called Levi to follow he was ready to leave it all behind. What about you? Is Jesus calling you out of a desperate and discouraging life situation? Maybe you are successful and wealthy, but empty and unsatisfied with all this world has to offer. Is Jesus calling you to follow and live life with a new purpose?

If you are not certain of your conversional call, then it can happen this morning!

*Preached by Dr. William Englehart 5/26/2019 @ FCBC