



## LESSON 7 // HOPE THAT HEALS THE HEART

One of the ways Jesus makes us new is by bringing fresh hope to our hearts. The story in Mark 2:13-17 describes a man who needed hope, healing and a fresh start in his life from the Lord:

**Mark 2:13-17 (NIV)** *Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <sup>14</sup> As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. <sup>15</sup> While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup> When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Let's look at three important truths we learn from Levi's encounter with Jesus about how the Lord wants to bring hope and healing to us.

### 1. The problem of our heart

From the outside, Levi the tax collector was a man of wealth, authority and control. He carried a big stick and was feared by many. But he was also a sick man—spiritually sick. He had problems on the inside.

Based on the way Jesus reached out to him, we can understand some of Levi's internal problems: he was pursuing the wrong *priorities*, lacking spiritual *peace*, dissatisfied with a superficial *purpose* and debilitated by a lack of *power*.

The Bible has much to say to us about the condition of our heart. Proverbs 4:23 states, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Jeremiah 17:9 gives us this stark reality: "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" If our heart is sick, every part of our life will inevitably be affected. We may have our lives externally together, like Levi did, and yet have a sin-sick heart.

### 2. The Healer of our heart

It's wonderful to see that Jesus found His way to Levi's neighborhood. Jesus knew exactly where this man was, and He went to him.

We also see what Jesus did to bring healing to Levi's heart: Jesus *saw* him, *confronted* him and *called* him. Jesus' call to "follow me" implied something like this: "Levi, you have been following the wrong priorities and pursuing the wrong purpose with your life long enough. I have something new for you—a better direction for your life. Just start following Me and keep on following Me!"

The Lord issues the same charge to us today. Healing for the heart requires more than a diagnosis; it also requires a confrontation.

Levi was now at a crossroad because Jesus lovingly confronted him. He would have to choose his direction. Would he obey the command Jesus gave him? Would he choose to put his faith in the Lord and do what Christ had called him to do? These are the kinds of choices we also face when the Lord confronts us.

### **3. The prescription for our heart**

The most accurate diagnosis from the greatest doctor in the world can't cure a diseased person without two essential elements: (1) a sure treatment plan—a prescription for healing; and (2) a conscientious commitment on the part of the patient to follow the prescription.

This was true of Levi. It was now up to him. The Great Physician had diagnosed his problem and offered him the cure. Levi's destiny would be determined by his response. What did he do that changed his life?

- *Put his faith in Jesus.*
- *Made the decision to follow Christ.*
- *Cut the ties that bound him to the past.*
- *Influenced others to follow Christ.*

Levi was a changed man! He even received a new name—Matthew ("gift of God"). Jesus had seen in this man a whole set of gifts that Matthew never saw in himself. When Levi started following the Lord, his true giftings finally flourished. Matthew became one of the twelve apostles and the instrument through which the Holy Spirit gave us the first Gospel!

We never know who we really are and the real potential of our life apart from Christ. It's only in following Him that we find and fulfill the giftings God ordained for us.

This same Jesus who walked beside the sea of Galilee and saw Levi in his sin is still changing lives today! He's still looking for people like Levi with heart problems—and He's still curing these conditions. Jesus' words recorded in Mark 2:17 continue to be true for us: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### **Discussion questions**

1. Read Proverbs 4:23 and Jeremiah 17:9. What do these verses tell you about "the problem of our heart" and how we should respond?
2. How does Jesus bring healing to our hearts? What part do we play in this process?
3. Read Mark 2:17. Why is it important to understand that Jesus didn't come for the "healthy" (righteous) but the "sick" (sinners)? What difference should this make in your walk with Him?