

“Follow Me”: Our Mission Defined and Displayed

Introduction

Fall Kickoff

- A. Every year, as part of our Fall Kickoff, Joey and I are thinking it would be good for us and good for the church if we revisit our church’s mission statement and preach some special message on it.
 - 1. The hope is that this would help unite and energize the church as we transition from the summer months (where things tend to be a little more casual with people traveling here and there) to the fall—and the revving engine of a new cycle at work or school. We thought it would be good to kickstart the fall this way—get reacquainted with what we’re doing here.
 - a. And, of course, if you’re new to our church and just checking things out, the hope is that this will be helpful for you too. Because you get to see what we’re about and why.
- B. So that’s what I want to do this morning. And I want to begin by reading with you from the Gospel of Luke, [Luke 5:27-32](#).
 - 1. It’s the story where Jesus goes after Levi, the tax collector, with his grace.
 - 2. And, though I’m not going to deal with this story in the beginning of the sermon, I’ll come back to it a little later—because I think it fleshes out and puts color on our church’s mission statement in many ways.

The Text

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” ²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. ²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:27-32)

What’s the Point of the Church?

- A. Have you ever wondered: What’s the point of the church? What are we doing here?
 - 1. We show up on Sundays, do our little thing, why?
 - 2. We’ve got our midweek stuff—gatherings here and there, service projects here and there, special events here and there—for what reason?

- a. Why are we doing this? What's the point? What's the purpose of the church, the mission of the church?
- B. In one way or another, every pastor or pastoral team has to try to come up with some sort of answer to this for the church he's responsible to shepherd. What are we doing here? What is Mercy Hill all about?
 - 1. And, of course, in our attempt to provide an answer . . .
 - a. We could try to cobble something together from our own intuitions and desires: "This is what I think the church should be about."
 - b. We could copy > paste from some other seemingly successful churches and say: "Okay, if it's working for them to do things this way, it should work for us as well."
 - c. We could read the latest books on church growth and see what the "professionals" are saying on the matter and let that guide the way.
 - 2. But, it should go without saying, if we really want to see what the church is supposed to be about, we have to go back to the one who established it in the first place. In other words, we have to go back to God and we have to go back to what he's said and revealed to us in the Scriptures.
 - a. And I think, when you do that, that's when you start to see why the mission statement of Mercy Hill is what it is.
- C. So what I want to do this morning is . . .
 - 1. first define our mission statement for you—make sure we're clear on it.
 - 2. Then I want to show you how its put on display—how it's exemplified, in the life and ministry of Jesus (particularly in the story from [Luke 5](#) that we read).
 - a. So two headings: (1) Our Mission Defined; and (2) Our Mission Displayed.

(1) Our Mission Defined

Bit-by-Bit

- A. "Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ."
- B. That's our mission statement as it stands now.
 - 1. You'll find it written on the back side of your worship guide.
 - 2. You'll find it written time and again on our website.
 - 3. You'll see it on some of the slides that flip through on the screen during our Sunday Services.
 - 4. And I hope you've come to find that it really is the heartbeat of this church—it's the lifeblood that courses through the veins of this place . . . it's the point.

5. But, more than any of this, I hope you see we get it all from the Bible!

C. So let's look quickly at it bit-by-bit . . .

"Restore"

A. Our statement begins: "Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us . . ."

1. The word "restore" there reminds us that things in this life are not currently what they ought to be.
2. Restoration is needed because some kind of breakdown has occurred.

B. I don't think there's a person—inside this room or outside of it—who would disagree with me on this point.

1. This world, as beautiful as it can be sometimes, is also terribly, heart-wrenchingly broken.
2. And it's broken, not just out there, but in here . . . in me.
 - a. We may have different ideas as to how things got broken and what we need to get right if we can even get right,
 - b. but we all agree: something isn't right. We need restoration.

C. Well, the church exists to partner with God in this restoration project.

"To God, Neighbor, and City"

A. But then, in our little statement, we see where we need this restoration in particular. There are three key words there: restore us to "God", restore us to "neighbor", restore us to "city".

1. With regard to God, you remember, in [Gen. 1](#), Adam and Eve, the first representatives of humanity, are created to exist in God's presence, as his friends, enjoying intimate relationship with him. They experienced his delight over them: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" ([Gen. 1:31](#)).
 - a. We were created not just by him but for him.
2. With regard to neighbor, you remember, in [Gen. 2](#), God said it was "not good that the man should be alone" ([v. 18](#)). "They need community. They need relationship—not just with me, but with one another as well. Or they're not going to be okay."
 - a. We were to be in his presence as his people—not just as individuals in relationship with God doing our own thing, but collectively together with him.
3. With regard to city, you remember, back in [Gen. 1](#), God gives them a sense of purpose in the place that he's put them. "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," he says. "Subdue it and have dominion over it. Take the boundary-line of Eden and expand it until my glory covers the earth as water the sea" (cf. [v. 28](#)).

- a. So they were in his presence, as his people, with his purpose.
 - b. They had proper relationship with God, neighbor, and city . . . until they didn't.
- B. Until [Gen. 3](#), when, in sin, they side with serpent against God and his word—and the whole tapestry of creation just unravels. And all that God had established for us starts to break down.
 - 1. Suddenly, now, God's presence isn't the joy of our lives, but a terrifying thing. So he comes looking for them and they're hiding, trembling in fear. Because they know they've done wrong. And they know he's holy. And they know the relationship is now broken. They can't have what they used to have.
 - a. Sinners can't commune with a holy God.
 - 2. But it's not just their relationship with God that's broken. It's their relationship with each other as well. "The woman you gave me made me do it! She's the problem" (cf. [Gen. 3:12](#)). Adam was singing over his wife in [Gen. 2](#) and then blaming her for his own sin in [Gen. 3](#).
 - a. And, now, instead of bearing fruit and multiplying and filling the earth with image-bearers truly reflecting the glory of God to world round about them—now they're filling the earth with brokenness.
 - i. So Cain and Abel, the first kids of Adam and Eve mentioned in the Bible, also become main players in the first murder. "[Am I my brother's keeper?](#)" Cain said to God when he came asking for Abel ([Gen. 4:9](#)). What a tragic line that is.
 - (1) You're supposed to be family, in close relation with each other.
 - (2) Now there's just distance and disdain.
 - 3. And their relationship with city, or the place that they've been put, it goes all off too. No longer are they living for the purposes of God, but for themselves.
 - a. So [Gen. 1-2](#), after [Gen. 3](#), give way to [Gen. 11](#) and the building of the tower of Babel—where now we're building and working, not to make God's name known, to lift him up . . . but to "[make a name for ourselves](#)" (v. 4).
- C. It's all wrong. In every direction.
 - 1. In an upward sense, we're off in our relationship with God.
 - 2. In an inward sense, we're off in our relationship with each other.
 - 3. In an outward sense, we're off in the way we relate to the city and world around us.

"Through the Good News of Jesus Christ"

- A. And this is the world we live in (I know you feel it!). But this is not the way God intends for things to remain.

1. And that's where we come to the last part there: "Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ."
- B. So even directly after the fall of [Gen. 3](#), God makes a promise ([v. 15](#)) of one who will someday come and put his heel to the head of the serpent (though the serpent would in the process wound him as well). He will take all the brokenness and turn it to beauty again.
1. He's the one who will lead the way in this rescue mission, this restoration project. And his name is Jesus.

Towards Luke 5 . . .

- A. And we see him at work in this right here in our text, in [Luke 5](#), with Levi the tax collector.
1. This morning, I wanted to define our mission for you, sure.
 2. But I especially wanted you to see it on display in the one who is the head of the church, in Christ.
 - a. He's the one who's bringing us back upward to God, inward to neighbor, and outward to city.
 - b. And, as we're personally swept up by his grace, we get to partner with him in this as well!
- B. So let me show this to you.
1. We'll talk about what it looks like with Jesus and Levi here.
 2. But we'll also consider what it looks like with us at Mercy Hill as well.

(2) Our Mission Displayed

Bit-by-Bit

- A. With this second heading, as I did with the first, I'm going to make our way bit-by-bit through the key words of our mission statement—only this time, I'm going to show you how it's playing out in the story presently before us.

"Restore"

- A. So, first, "Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us . . ."
- B. Look at the way our text begins, [Luke 5:27](#): "After this he [Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth."
1. If you're new to the Bible, you might not immediately sense the profound nature of what's happening here.
 2. For any reader in Jesus' day, even the mention of a tax collector would have sent shudders down their spine. They were some of the most despised people in all of Israel.

C. Why? Well, for a number of reasons . . .

1. So first, politically, they were viewed as collaborators, traitors. Levi is a Jew. But, as a tax collector, he's chosen to work for Rome. He's collecting money from his fellow Jews for the Romans. Rome is occupying the Holy Land at this point, oppressing the Jewish people. The Jews hated the Romans. Little groups were rising up all the time, trying to overthrow Rome. That's what they all hoped the Messiah would come to do above all else, get Rome out, restore the land to God's people.
 - a. The Jews hated the Romans, and yet these tax collecting Jews were working for them.
 - b. As one commentator puts it: "Anyone familiar with "moles" and informants in Nazi and Communist regimes will appreciate the loathing of tax collectors in first-century Judaism. There cannot have been many Jews in first-century Palestine who expected (or wished!) to see in a tax collector anything other than the husk of an individual whose soul had been eaten away by complicity with Roman repression" (PNTC).
 - i. What an image! "You don't even have a soul anymore. You sold it to Rome to make a buck for yourself off the very back of your people to the neglect of our God!"
2. But then, second, ceremonially, they were viewed as unclean.
 - a. For the strict Israelite, the fact that tax collectors had to maintain continual contact with Gentiles in the course of their work rendered them perpetually ceremonially unclean. He just tracks spiritual mud wherever he goes.
3. And then, third, ethically, they were regarded as cheats, extortionists, robbers. It is a well-known fact that these men would often manipulate the tax rates and squeeze more money from folks so they could line their own pockets with it.
 - a. This is why when the tax collectors come to John the Baptist, repentant, asking what shall we do, he says to them: "Collect no more than you are authorized to do" (Luke 3:13).
 - b. And it's why when Zacchaeus was called by Jesus and changed, he says: "[I]f I have defrauded anyone of anything, I [will] restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8).
 - i. Because that's what they would do. Collect more than they should. Defraud. Cheat. Steal. From their own people!

D. And I bring this up under the word "restore" . . . why?

1. Because I think it showcases not only the brokenness of the situation here,
2. but the fact that we're all looking for something to fix us and fill us.
 - a. That's why Levi is sitting at the tax booth. He's looking for something. He was willing to turn on his own countrymen, to work for "the enemy," to cut corners, to cheat and steal . . . because he thought money would make things better.

- i. That's how I can climb up in the world, find security, satisfaction, get access to all the pleasing stuff of life.

E. Anyone relate to that?

1. This is Silicon Valley, one of the richest places in the world.
2. We may not bow down to golden calves, but we bow down to gold all the time, don't we?
3. We've got Levis all over this city—mere husks of men and women, people selling their souls for a slice of the pie.

F. One commentator mentions that, because of his work as a tax collector, Levi (or Matthew as he's referred to in another Gospel [cf. Matt. 9:9])—likely a second name) “must have been the richest of [all] the apostles” (TNTC).

1. He had it everything, and yet . . . he had nothing!
2. He needed restoration. He knew it.
 - a. But he didn't know how to get it.
 - b. Until it came and got him!

“To God”

A. Here's where we see Jesus is first restoring him to a relationship with God. Keep reading in v. 27: *After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.”*

1. What an amazing scene this is. Jesus meets him right there in the tax booth, right there in the very act of sin and rebellion.
 - a. Jesus doesn't wait for us to clean up and come to him. He comes to us in our uncleanness.
 - b. He meets us in our mess.
2. Right there, in that place, the invitation is issued: “Follow me.”
 - a. “Levi, I know you've been looking here and there and everywhere for something that could fix and fill and satisfy.
 - b. I'm telling you: you don't need more stuff . . . you need me. As a Jew, you've lived around the truths of God, but you've never really experienced him.”
 - i. “Follow me.”

B. I thought here of that well-known statement from Augustine's *Confessions*: After trying to chase down joy in all the wrong places, he finally comes out at the end and concludes this: “You have made us for Yourself, [O Lord,] and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You” (1.1.1.).

1. Is your heart restless this morning?

- a. Well, now you know why. You're looking in the wrong direction.
 - b. You're looking to the left, to the right, to the front, to the back. You might even be looking down . . . but you forgot to look up. "Follow me."
- C. I love Levi's response. Check it out there in v. 28: "And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."
- 1. There's no discussion. There's no pushback. There's no compromise.
 - 2. He leaves "everything" to lay hold of Jesus.
- D. In the NT, we see that often it's the poor who are rich in faith. It's a regular theme, especially in Luke's Gospel actually.
 - 1. But, as this story reminds us, sometimes, it's the richest of people who are the most ready for Jesus. Why?
 - a. Because, in some sense, they've already had all the world could offer . . . and found it lacking.
 - 2. I think far worse than not getting what you want is actually getting what you want and finding it insufficient. That's the more troubling place to be.
 - a. Because . . . now what? I got it. And it didn't do it for me. Now what?
 - i. Of course, you could start running after something else.
 - ii. You could just give up and spiral into depression.
 - iii. Or, like Levi, you could leave "everything" behind and follow Jesus. That's what I've been missing . . . God!
- E. That's where Levi's at. That's where we want to be at. That's why as a church we talk so much about our core value of Faith. We want to help people be restored upward in relationship with him.
 - 1. Maybe that's what Jesus wants to get started for you today. Come to him, follow him!

F. But there's more . . .

"To Neighbor"

- A. Jumping back into the story, Jesus isn't just restoring Levi to God, to himself. He's restoring him to other people as well—people he's hurt, people he's been ostracized from and at odds with.
 - 1. When you're restored back to God you're also going to be restored to neighbor. It's a package deal.
- B. In our day, people like to separate the two.

1. “Oh I’ll take a relationship with Jesus just fine, but I can’t stand his church. I don’t want to be a part of that, have to deal with that. They’re obnoxious, they’re self-righteous at times, they’re too up in my business . . . they’re sinners like me.”
 2. But Jesus won’t let us have him without his people.
 - a. In fact, one of the litmus tests the NT gives us for how we are doing in our relationship with Jesus is to look at how we are doing in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the church. If we’re off with them we’re off with him.
 - b. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).
 - i. If we’re truly reconciled with him, if we get what that cost him . . . we will do anything we can to be reconciled and in good relationship with each other.
 - (1) So are you moving towards people, even the challenging people? Or are you moving away?
- C. In our text, this restoring to neighbor is implied when we see that, at this dinner party, Jesus isn’t just eating with Levi. It’s not a private affair. Instead, one of the things we see is that the other “disciples” are there (v. 30; cf. Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:15).
1. You come to Jesus, you’re going to get his people. You’re coming into community.
 - a. And these are all Jewish dudes. So Levi was probably nervous about this. They were, no doubt, upset about this. But here they are, around the table together.
- D. In fact, it’s crazy, you know, I mentioned that Levi, who’s also referred to as Matthew actually becomes one of the twelve apostles.
1. Well, to the twelve Jesus would also add a guy by the name of Simon whom Matthew, Mark, and Luke all go out of their way to say he was a “Zealot” (Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13).
 - a. What’s a Zealot?
 - i. Well, it seems he was a part of this growing movement there in Israel with guys who considered themselves so zealous for God that they were therefore vehemently opposed to Rome. They wanted to throw off their rule and restore the land to Israel and bring back in the theocracy and all this.
 - ii. And, naturally, they also then were against the payment of tribute or taxes to some pagan emperor claiming such a thing was treason to God, Israel’s true King.

2. So that's Simon the Zealot. And then Jesus, in his infinite wisdom, decides to set him at the same table as Levi the tax collector? A guy who represents the polar opposite extreme. What's he doing?!
 - a. You thought your Thanksgiving dinner table can get explosive when Uncle Bob sits down next Aunt Suzie and they start talking politics.
 - b. What do you think these two were like together at first?
 - i. It's just a powder keg ready to blow.
 - ii. But it doesn't blow, does it. Why?
 - (1) Because this is what Jesus has come to do: reconcile us to each other, break down "the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14), bring us into one community, restore us to neighbor . . . around himself.
- E. So this is why as a church we talk so much about our core value of Community. We want to help people be restored inward in relationship with other people.
 1. That's why part of what we're doing with this Fall Kickoff thing is calling you to plug in if you haven't already. We really do believe that if you're not in regular relationship with other Christians in a deep and significant way, you won't be a healthy follower of Jesus.
- F. And please don't think I'm saying that this means that your relationships with those in the church are going to be easy.
 1. There are going to be times where it's going to bring out stuff that's hard, right? And you're going to be upset. You're going to get frustrated.
 2. But that's actually an important part of the growth and the development process.
 - a. It's like going to the gym.
 - i. It's not always fun. Some of you guys are crazy. You think it's fun. Grunting, sweating, putting another plate on the bar and trembling under the weight of it. But for most of us, at least in the moment, it's just hard.
 - ii. But you've got to do it or you won't be strong. You won't grow. You won't be healthy. And if you put it off and put it off and put it off because it's not fun, eventually you get weaker, you go backwards, you get in terrible shape. You won't have the kind of body that you need to function well.
 - b. And it's the same way spiritually. If you take the easy way out—and either do your Christianity alone or you only hang out with the folks who are just like you, and you don't do the kind of hard lifting day-in-day-out community with the church—you won't be strong. You'll be frail. You'll be anemic.
 - i. So plug in! Walk with Jesus with others. Let him restore you to God . . . and to neighbor!

G. But there's more . . .

"To City"

A. You saw that in our text with Levi, didn't you?

1. Yes, he's brought into relationship with Jesus, restored to God.
2. Yes, he's brought into the community of disciples and the church, restored to neighbor.
3. But he's also got this renewed sense of purpose in the place God has put him—and he wants to live for so much more than just himself. In other words, he's also restored to city.
 - a. Before it was just all about me—cut everyone else off to get more money, more stuff, for me.
 - b. Now, if you noticed, he's not content to just have relationship with Jesus and church folks. He wants to go out and bring others in.
 - i. Look at [v. 29](#) again: "And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them."

B. And I think this comes against another error we often see in the church these days . . .

1. We say: "Okay, I'll take Jesus. I'll even take his people and make them my people." And that's good. But, then, over time it's like: "But I don't want to have relationship with anyone else, any of those unclean outsiders, those people who've rejected Jesus, those people who don't live lives like we think they should." They're rough. They use bad language. They don't share our values. All that. So we keep them at a distance. We stay with our church folks and we don't want anything to do with the rest.
2. That's not what we see here. Levi wants to introduce his old crew to his new crew and to the one who changed everything for him, Jesus. It's restoration to God, neighbor, and city.

C. That's what we want here at Mercy Hill. That's why we talk so much about our core value of Mission.

1. We don't just exist for us. We're to be salt and light in this place.
2. It's not about our name. It's about his name and introducing others to the one who's changed us.

D. That's part of the call with this Fall Kickoff to, not just to plug in but to pour out—to live for more than just ourselves, both inside and outside the church.

1. Who are you inviting in?
2. How are you pouring out?
3. What can you do to reach this city that needs you and needs Jesus?

"Through the Good News of Jesus Christ"

- A. And, of course, all of this restoration to God, neighbor, and city only ultimately happens “through the good news of Jesus Christ”—in other words: because of the gospel, because of the cross.
- B. The only reason Jesus can share the table with Levi is because he knows he’ll soon die for him.
 - 1. As I said back near the beginning: “Sinners can’t commune with a holy God.” Yet here Jesus is communing with Levi. How?
 - 2. Well, he’s going to deal with his sin. Where? At the cross. “In my place condemned he stood.”
 - a. He’s treated as the collaborator, as the traitor, as the defrauder, as the unclean thing, as the sinner.
 - b. He is literally reduced to a husk of a man as his soul is wrenched from his body and his corpse is laid in that tomb.
- C. Don’t you see? Sin has to be dealt with if we’re going to get to come back and have relationship with God and experience any of this restoration in any of these directions.
 - 1. Jesus didn’t come merely to eat with us. He came to live and die and rise for us.
 - 2. That’s what throws back open the door. That’s what makes all this possible.
- D. And that’s why, as a church, we are jealous to keep the gospel at the center of everything we do.
 - 1. If we don’t keep the cross in its place at the center, there will be no restoration to God, no restoration to neighbor, no restoration the city—no Faith, Community, Mission.
 - 2. But, if we do, there will!
- E. So, “Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.”
 - 1. I pray you’ll join us in this mission?!