

Calling All Sinners

5:27-32

Intro: Luke is a Gentile physician writing to another Gentile named, Theophilus. His hope is to lay a solid foundation for Theophilus's faith, to ensure his belief and help him explain Christianity to other people.

From the very beginning, Luke has quickly illustrated that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, to be pointed, God in the flesh.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

He did not intend to.

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity

This idea that Jesus is God to the exclusion of every other god is hard for some people to accept.

By this time in his Gospel, and after showing last week how Jesus forgave sins, something only God can do, Luke anticipates that Theophilus or his friends might be arguing, "How can you definitively say that Jesus is the only way to God?" So, he captured Jesus addressing that very question in next week's text, vs 33-39.

But to prove Luke and Lewis's points, that the question is already answered, Jesus has demonstrated power over the:

- a) Supernatural realm exorcising demons.
- b) Physical realm healing the sick.
- c) Spiritual realm forgiving sins.

What is Jesus doing? As the *Son of Man*, Jesus's favorite phrase for himself, (Dan 7:9-14), he's reclaiming the dominion God originally gave Adam (Gen 1:27-28). Where the first

son of God proved untrustworthy and unfaithful, Jesus is the son in whom the Father is "well pleased" (Lk 3:21-22).

As such, Jesus has to exercise fidelity in God's mission for him which is, according to 5:32, "to call...sinners to repentance."

First: Calling Levi. 27-29

Soon after Jesus healed the paralytic in Capernaum, he approached a tax collector conducting business in the town (Mark 2:13-14). Capernaum was the largest city on the Sea of Galilee and a crossroads for North-South, East-West trade.

"It was the last village on the road running northeast across the Jordan from Herod Antipas's territory, Galilee, to Herod Philip's territory, Gaulinitus, and on to Damascus."

- David Garland in *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*

It was the perfect place for a tax collector to get rich.

When Luke says that Levi is a "tax collector," his readers knew everything they needed to know about Levi. Tax collectors personified the saying, "filthy rich."

- Tax collectors/publicans were detested Jews who served Rome's interests.
- They were also crooked, basically thieves, or gangsters.
- They were the dregs of society, the lowest of the low and symbolized the worst sinners.

IMP: Israel was subject to Roman taxation. Rome sold franchises to the highest bidders who were required to collect Rome's taxes but could add their own fees onto the tax to subsidize their costs and living. So, tax collectors collected more than Rome's taxes and, as such, were considered robbers.

- There was a poll tax on people.
- There was a tax on homes.
- There was a tax on slaves and livestock.
- There was a tax on grain, wine, and fruit.
- There was a tax on transporting anything on the roads, across bridges, etc.
- There was even a postal tax.
- Tax collectors charged exorbitant interest on unpaid taxes.
- They also employed thugs to intimidate people into paying.

- Their businesses were often so large that they hired people to sit in booths and collect the taxes for them. This is what Levi is doing.
- There is no doubt that Levi, as the local tax collector in Capernaum, collected taxes from Peter and Andrew, James, and John, who owned a fishing business there.
- He knew them. They knew him and it was not a friendly relationship.
- No one invited Matthew to play soccer or Sabbath dinner.
- He was "sinfully rich and socially ostracized."
- There is little question Matthew had already heard Jesus preach and witnessed the frenzied effects of his miracles in Capernaum.

This isn't the only tax collector Jesus will meet. But suddenly and without warning, Jesus showed up at Levi's tax office.

a) What Jesus saw 27

The original Levi = Priest

- The 3rd of Jacob and Leah's 6 sons
- The founder of the tribe of Levi.
- The great-grandfather of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

His parents undoubtedly named him Levi in the hope of his life honoring God.

This Levi is called "Levi" by Luke and Mark (2:14) but also called by his Greek name, "Matthew," in Matthew 9:9 & 10:3 – ("*Matthew, the tax collector*"). Matthew appears in all four lists of the Twelve (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13).

"saw" = *theaomai* = (theater) to look with attention, staring.

The Romans, Pharisees and common Jews saw one thing when they saw Levi. Jesus saw something else. We should see ourselves. We are sitting in our sin, going about our business and will die that way unless Jesus interrupts.

b) What Jesus said – "*Follow me.*"

Just a few days earlier, Jesus said to Peter, Luke 5:10-11c – "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*" And when they had brought their boats to land, they [Peter, Andrew, James & John] *left everything and followed him.*"

Now the same call that lifted the paralytic from his bed, lifts Levi from his toll booth.

At that point, they never imagined that a Jewish Messiah, who had called Jewish synagogue-attending men to work with him, would ever call a Jewish betrayer to serve alongside them. It was beyond imagination, out of the question, anathema.

In 3½ years with Jesus, he tested the disciples a lot, but this is a first test soon on the heels of their own enlistment and one that cannot be taken lightly.

In addition, it's probably not only the disciples who are closely following Jesus at this point. It's the Capernaum crowds and the Pharisees who watched him heal the paralytic.

IMP: Rabbis called disciples to follow the Torah. Jesus calls disciples to follow him. Why? He is the *"end of the law [Torah] for righteousness to everyone who believes."* (Romans 10:4)

c) How Levi surrendered

1 – he followed. 28

"follow" = *"he began to follow"* implying an unknown future.

Was it hard for Matthew to follow? Peter, Andrew, John, and James could have quickly returned to fishing. One Levi stood up, someone else quickly, gladly sat down to assume his job. There was no going back for him. He didn't just leave everything (28a). He lost everything.

It is interesting that Matthew records Jesus saying,

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:23)

His surrender is in stark contrast to another rich young person –

Mark 10:17-22 - And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."²¹ And Jesus, looking at

him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

It's not just riches. It's popularity, social status, job, friendships, etc. There are many idols, even self, that people love more than God. (We'll talk about that in a moment).

But Levi's 'leaving' is a good illustration of repentance. He left "*everything*" and followed Jesus.

That's why what Levi did next is important –

2 – He feasted. 29

As far as we know, this is Levi's last use of his property and funds. After today, he won't be able to afford a house or a party like this.

Of note: The Gospels never record Matthew speaking. In his own Gospel, Matthew records only his calling and naming among the 12 apostles. He also omits any reference to leaving anything behind. Is that his humility? Did he see it as gaining and not losing, unnecessary, unworthy to mention?

He invited tax collectors because they were his only friends.

"feast" = doxe = Luke 14:13 – "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind..." (These may be the "*sinners*" referred to by the Pharisees (v 30).

These are the "others" the Pharisees criticized.

Others = allos = of the same kind. Not necessarily tax collectors, but ostracized people.

He invited others because they were all detested and considered "*sinners*." Who else could he invite? No one. Who else would he invite? No one.

They may have imagined Levi was crazy to leave tax collecting to follow an itinerant carpenter turned rabbi, but they weren't going to miss out on a good, free meal. And Matthew wanted them to meet Jesus.

IMP: (This is a hard, but true statement) Some of you won't become Christians because you love someone who is not a Christian. You are afraid of offending them, losing them,

or of them leaving you. But in reality, that's self-love. If you really love your friends, you want them to know the truth. You want them to go to Heaven. In reality, you use that excuse because you love yourself more than you love your friends or family. You're more concerned about your loss than you are theirs. That statement may anger you, but if you'll think about it, you'll know it's true.

In Levi we see the traitor, robber, outcast sinner leaves his old life to become a follower of Jesus. He lost a career but gained Christ. He lost a job but gained Heaven. He forfeited temporal possessions but gained...

"an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven..." (1 Peter 1:4).

He lost friends but found *"fellowship...with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3).

Second: Criticizing Pharisees. 30

Levi's meal was a very public event. People must have thought it was a gathering of tax collectors to see how they could raise taxes.

29 – "reclining at the table with him" implies they were sincere friends, and the meal lasted a long time. And Jesus was right there with them. And what would a party be without the Pharisees!

The Pharisees didn't go in but they stood outside to question Peter, Andrew, James, and John. But it was Jesus who answered.

- a) *"grumbling"* = *gogguzo* = an 'onomatopoetic word' = (swoosh, roar, mumble). It is what it sounds like, like a bee's buzzing.

There's a little bit of Pharisee in all of us, isn't there?

- b) To eat with sinners was to contract their sin.
- c) Their question is rhetorical. They didn't expect an answer because they don't think there is an answer.

Third: Jesus's Response 31-32

Being a doctor, Luke must have loved this saying of Jesus.

- a) The Pharisees are correct – Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners.

(Remember last week. You can be correct and wrong at the same time)

At the same time, Jesus is not contaminated by sin. As the leper in 5:12-16 demonstrates, Jesus cleanses.

- b) Jesus is fulfilling the OT

Matthew 9:12-13 - But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' [Hosea 6:6] For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

He is doing what the Pharisees should have been doing.

- c) By saying that Jesus is eating with sinners, the Pharisees are claiming not to be sinners, i.e., righteous people.
- d) Jesus leaves the Pharisees in their self-righteous sin.

James 4:6 - God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

In reality, "self-righteous(ness)" is an oxymoron. It doesn't exist. No one can be self-righteous.

- e) As the divine physician, Jesus has the cure for what ails us.

Jesus was doing what a doctor does, hang out with sick people all day.

The Pharisees practiced "salvation by segregation." Jesus practiced "salvation by association."

- f) Like Levi, we too are called to "*repentance*."

John shouted repentance to people (Matt 3:2). Jesus shared repentance with them.

But don't think you can keep being what you were, doing what you did, and follow Jesus. You can't.

Conclusion:

1 - Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus didn't require people to change *before* coming to Him. He sought them out, met them where they were, and extended grace to them in their circumstances. But everyone who came to and followed Jesus did change, from the inside out. This is the kindness of God that leads sinners to repentance (Romans 2:4).

2 - The old saying goes, "*If you want the job done right, find the right person to do it.*" Jesus avoided that logic. Instead of choosing preachers or tacticians, he chose a motley crew of everyday sinners and Levi is a prime example.

He knew he needed saving and "*leaving everything, he rose and followed him*" (28).

3 - The Pharisees wouldn't even follow Jesus into Levi's house. They have excluded themselves from grace. Some people listening to me are doing the same thing.

But in order to be saved, you have to accept Jesus's diagnosis. You're a sinner.

When Jesus calls sinners, He is calling all of us. There is a cure for your pride, lust, greed, unhappiness, depression, isolation, for whatever is making you sick of life and yourself. It's Jesus.

Community Groups

1. Read the text.
2. What have you most enjoyed about Luke so far?
3. What has been the most surprising?
4. How has Luke demonstrated his claim that Jesus is God?
5. Why does Jesus often call himself "the Son of Man?"
6. What do you know about tax collectors in Israel?
7. From the notes, discuss why tax collectors were hated in Israel.
8. Why might Levi's parents have given him that name?
9. What would have made Levi leave everything so quickly?
10. Why might Levi have thrown this feast?
11. What irritated the Pharisees?
12. Why didn't they like Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners?
13. How were the Pharisees correct?

14. How were the Pharisees wrong?
15. What does Jesus's response say about the Pharisees?
16. From Jesus's response, what is required to follow him?
17. How do you apply this text to your life?

Daily Devotion

Monday, April 29th. Read Lk 5:27-32, 19:1-9 & 2 Tim 2:24-26. Repentance is a divinely wrought change of mind, heart, and behavior. Both of them demonstrated repentance but differently. How? Why? Reflect on your life. Of what have you repented? BTW, repentance can be likened to a 'course correction' and is a daily exercise. You might say it like this – we repent of sin in salvation but repent of sins in sanctification. Keep repenting. It's one of the best ways you know you are a Christian.

Tuesday, April 30th. Read Lk 5:27-32; Ro 10:1-4 & Eph 2:5-8. Rabbis taught disciples to follow the Torah. Jesus taught disciples to follow him. Why? How is Jesus the "*end of the law?*" We are all law-keepers (Pharisees) at heart and want to help God save us and others. How do you do this? What can you do to "put off" the Pharisee in you? What part might grace play in your attempt to do so? Have you memorized Eph 2:5-8. This would be a good week to do so.

Wednesday, May 1st. Read Lk 5:27-32; Mt 19:23 & Mk 20:17-22. Why did Jesus say it is hard for materially wealthy people to get to Heaven? Why was it hard for the rich young ruler to forsake his wealth? Why is wealth so important to us? Is it a matter of trust? Can we trust God with our lives? How did Levi demonstrate trust? How might you use your wealth to demonstrate trust in God? BTW, Americans rank comfortably in the top 10% of wealth in the world. Compared to the rest of the world, you are rich and all of us struggle with this issue.

Thursday, May 2nd. Read Mt 9:10-17; Mk 2:15-22; Lk 5:27-32; & 14:13. Who are your closest friends? With whom do you spend most of your time? Does your circle of friends include people unlike you? When was the last time you ate or drank with tax collectors and sinners? Perhaps this is the week to get to know people unlike yourself and invest in relationships to share the gospel.

Friday, May 3rd. Read Lk 5:27-32 & Matt 9:10-17. What does it mean to "*desire mercy, and not sacrifice?*" How did Jesus demonstrate that verse in eating with Levi's friends? To whom did you last extend mercy rather than demanding sacrifice from them? To whom might you extend mercy now? Think about that as you interact with people today.

