

Luke 5:27-32
October 28, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What do you think evangelism “should” look like in our lives? [Let people engage]

Q: What is the closest you’ve come to spending time with those who are social outcasts or people we would not normally spend time with? [Let people engage]

If you’re like me, I find that today’s culture tends to separate us by socioeconomic status. When it comes to reaching someone, who is a social outcast or someone who is uncomfortable to be around, I have to say that I can’t think of anyone like that who is in my life. But even that statement presupposes that I’m actually looking for ways to hang out with the disenfranchised, or those who are spiritually crippled or bankrupt.

Transition: But there is good news for all of us. Jesus is aware of our cultural setting. And just because the spiritually bankrupt aren’t always social outcasts, we have plenty of opportunities to be faithful to the Great Commission with lost people who are already in our lives. Luke continues to share the ways Jesus conducted His ministry. And if we desire to be more effective at reaching the lost, then let’s pay attention to how Jesus does this. And let’s also observe Levi. I think **all of us can introduce Jesus to the lost by following the examples that both Jesus and Levi set for us.** Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

X-REF Mark 2:13-17; Matt 9:9-13

Point of Interest: It was not uncommon for Jews in the first century to have two names. It is likely that Jesus gave Levi his new name, Matthew, which means “the gift of God.”

V.27:

- 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,

V.28:

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

V.29:

- Then Levi **held a great banquet for Jesus at his house,** and a **large crowd of tax collectors** and others were eating with them.

V.30:

- 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’?**”

V.31:

- Jesus answered them, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.**

V.32:

- **I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.27: Let's set the scene. Where are we? [Per Mark's gospel, Jesus is by the lake] Who all is there? [A large crowd and a tax collector named Levi]

Observation: It appears that Jesus is not stationary. He is beside the lake and is "walking along." I picture him walking along the shore and large crowd starts to follow Him because He's teaching some more.

Q: As Jesus is walking along, who does he notice? [Levi manning his tax booth because he's a tax collector]

Q: Why would a tax booth be near a shoreline? [Because tax collectors levied tariffs on the merchandise that was brought through on ships or boats.]

Q: How would you describe the reputation of a tax collector in Jesus's day? [Horrible. They collected taxes for the Roman government and had a bad reputation for extortion and malpractice. Since tax rates were not always clear, it was easy for an unscrupulous man to take extra money.]

Q: What is extortion? [It's a criminal offense of obtaining money, property or services from an individual through coercion. AKA blackmail.]

Observation: If a tax collector came knocking at your door, you'd probably be nervous. Let's meet Levi. It's probably safe to say that Levi was among many tax collectors who extorted money from the citizens. Extortion is a crime.

Q: What does Jesus ask Levi to do? [To "follow me."]

Q V.28: How did Levi respond? [He got up, left everything, and followed Him.]

Q: Why do you think Levi showed no resistance to Jesus's invitation? [Let people engage, e.g. drawn to Jesus, knew he was a sinner and needed help, there's got to be a better life than extorting money from citizens, enabled by the Holy Spirit to say "yes."]

Q V.29: What does Levi do for Jesus? [He holds a "great banquet" for Jesus at his house]

Q: Who does Levi invite? [A bunch of his colleagues! He invites a large crowd of tax collectors and according to Mark, a bunch of "sinners."]

Observation: If you're able to put on a great banquet in your home and invite a large crowd of people to join you, you are probably living in a mansion-like house! Levi appears to be quite wealthy perhaps because he's been skimming off the top the monies he extorted for the Roman officials.

Q: Why do you think Levi invited a bunch of tax collectors to join him for dinner? [He wanted them to meet Jesus!]

Q: Levi is modeling something important for us. What do you see? [He was enthusiastic about introducing Jesus to his friends/colleagues. He drew from his circle of influence. He didn't go try to find strangers to come to his home, but rather to those with whom he had a relationship.]

Q: Who else attended the banquet besides a horde of tax collectors? [Mark says there were "sinners."]

Q: Mark puts the word "sinners" in quotes. What does he mean by that? ["Sinners" were those whose daily occupations rendered them ceremonially unclean, according to Pharisees. Thus, you were not to associate with them.]

Q: What is Jesus modeling when it comes to evangelism? [Be willing to hang out with lost people without regard to their social status or stigmas; We have to go where they are just like fishermen; Be willing to cultivate at least a connection as a starting point (and hopefully a relationship) in a comfortable setting; It's hard to go wrong opening your home and sharing a meal with someone. When you open your home, you're implicitly saying "You're welcome here." There's something about sharing a meal that breaks down barriers. No matter what, we are giving the gift of time.]

Q V.30: Who happens to be observing Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and "sinners?" [The Pharisee and the teachers of the law]

Q: What did the Pharisees ask the disciples who were obviously present at this banquet? [Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and "sinners?"]

Q: Why do you think the Pharisees complained about that? Why do they care?! [Because Jesus and His disciples were breaking a religious rule that they didn't subscribe to. The Pharisees say you don't associate with those who are unclean.]

Q V.31-32: Remember, the question was posed to the disciples, but who decides to answer it? [Jesus! "On hearing this..."]

Q: How does Jesus respond? [We're not here to help those who are healthy and don't need a doctor, but rather the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance]

Observation: Matthew's account includes a stronger statement from Jesus to the Pharisees: "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners."

Q: What do you think Jesus has observed about the Pharisees that caused him to say, "go and learn what it means to desire mercy, not sacrifice? [Let people engage]

Q: Jesus's answer reflects His purpose. What do you see? [He came to seek and to save the lost. Salvation happens when sinners repent.]

LOOK: Following religious rules is easier than following Jesus. As we examine our own lives, are there ways that we are trying to “add” to Jesus's way? As we examine our lives, are we being intentional to hang out with “sinners?” Are we willing to cultivate a connection so that we can bring them to Jesus? When we do, is the gospel message kept pure, i.e. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Him? Christianity is about a love RELATIONSHIP with Jesus through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. That's our foundation. Second, we need to FOLLOW Him! We need to be “all in!”

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 188). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

From the Old to the New (Luke 5:27–32)

When Jesus called Levi, He accomplished three things: He saved a lost soul; He added a new disciple to His band; and He created an opportunity to explain His ministry to Levi's friends and to the scribes and Pharisees. This event probably took place shortly after Jesus healed the palsied man, for the "official committee" was still there (Luke 5:17). And it is likely that Jesus at this time gave Levi his new name - "Matthew, the gift of God" (Luke 6:15; see also Matt. 9:9).

Matthew sat at the toll booth and levied duty on the merchandise that was brought through. Since the tax rates were not always clear, it was easy for an unscrupulous man to make extra money for himself. But even if a tax collector served honestly, the Jews still despised him for defiling himself by working for the Gentiles. John the Baptist had made it clear that there was nothing innately sinful in collecting taxes (Luke 3:12–13), and we have no evidence that Matthew was a thief. But to the Jews, Levi was a sinner, and Jesus was suspect for having anything to do with him and his sinner friends.

We wonder how much Matthew knew about Jesus. Our Lord's friendship with Peter and his partners would put Him in touch with the businessmen of Capernaum, and certainly Matthew had heard Jesus preach by the seaside. Matthew instantly obeyed the Lord's call, left everything, and followed Jesus. He was so overjoyed at his salvation experience that he invited many of his friends to rejoice with him (see Luke 15:6, 9, 23).

The scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus because they did not understand either His message or His ministry. Jesus simply did not fit into their traditional religious life. It is unfortunate when leaders resist change and refuse to try to understand the new things that God is doing. In order to help them understand, Jesus gave four illustrations of what He was doing.

The Physician (vv. 31–32). The scribes and Pharisees saw Matthew and his friends as condemned sinners, but Jesus saw them as spiritually sick "patients" who needed the help of a physician. In fact, He had illustrated this when He cleansed the leper and healed the paralytic. Sin is like a disease: it starts in a small and hidden way; it grows secretly; it saps our strength; and if it is not cured, it kills. It is tragic when sickness kills the body, but it is even more tragic when sin condemns the soul to hell.

The scribes and Pharisees were quick to diagnose the needs of others, but they were blind to their own needs, for they were sinners like everyone else. They appeared righteous on the outside but were corrupt within (Matt. 23:25–28). They may not have been "prodigal sons" who were guilty of sins of the flesh, but they were certainly "elder brothers" who were guilty of sins of the spirit (Luke 15:11–32; 2 Cor. 7:1).

As I was writing this chapter, I received a phone call from a woman in Canada who disagreed with my radio ministry and repeatedly condemned "the judgmental fundamentalists." I tried to reason with her from the Word, but she would not accept it. According to her, there was no hell and I had no right to preach about it. As I quoted Scripture to her, she hung up; all I could do was pause to pray for her, and I did it with a heavy heart.

The first step toward healing sin sickness is admitting that we have a need and that we must do something about it. False prophets give a false diagnosis that leads to a false hope (Jer. 6:14); but the servant of God tells the truth about sin, death, and hell, and offers the only remedy: faith

in Jesus Christ. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees could offer no hope to Matthew's friends, but Jesus could.

What a wonderful Physician Jesus is! He comes to us in love; He calls us; He saves us when we trust Him; *and He "pays the bill."* His diagnosis is always accurate, and His cure is perfect and complete. No wonder Matthew was so happy and wanted to share the Good News with his friends!

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 217-218)

4. JESUS'S DEMONSTRATION OF HIS AUTHORITY BY CALLING A TAX COLLECTOR (5:27–32) (Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17).

5:27–32. The call of **Levi** was the culmination of the previous two miracles. (Levi is named Matthew in Matt. 9:9.) Jesus had shown that He had the authority to make a person ceremonially clean and to forgive sins. Now those two authorities were brought to bear on one who was to become His disciple.

Luke did not mention Levi's duties as **a tax collector**. But his position alienated him from the religious community of his day (cf. Luke 5:29–31). He was seen as one who betrayed his nation for material gain, for tax collectors gathered money from the Jews to give to the Romans, who were Gentiles, who then did not have to work (cf. 3:12–13). Seemingly Levi would be an unlikely candidate for a disciple of the One who claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus simply spoke the words, **Follow Me**. Levi broke with his way of life; he **left everything and followed** Jesus. Levi's response was the same as that of the fishermen (5:11).

Luke's point would have been clear even if he had stopped with the account of Levi's decision to follow Jesus. But in order to drive the point home Luke related events which occurred at a reception which Levi, Jesus' new follower, gave for Jesus. Levi must have been a wealthy man, for **a great banquet** was prepared at his house and many guests were invited, including **a large crowd of tax collectors**. The same group of religious leaders had previously questioned Jesus' authority (v. 21) questioned the propriety of Jesus' association **with tax collectors and "sinners."** Not only was Jesus associating with people to whom the Pharisees objected, but He also was eating and drinking with them. Eating and drinking with others denotes a fellowship or camaraderie with them. Though the religious leaders **complained to Jesus' disciples ... Jesus answered** their objections (vv. 31–32). He noted that it was not His purpose **to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**. Here Jesus was not concerned about discussing who were "the righteous." His point was simply that His mission was to those in need of "repentance"—a change of heart and a change of life (cf. 3:7–14). **The Pharisees** sensed no need for such a change. Because He had shown authority in the two healings which preceded this account, the implication is that He was also able to fulfill His mission to sinners.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 180–183). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

The present account has been placed next to the preceding one because both Pharisees and scribes were opposing Jesus and because Jesus' ability to forgive sins in 5:17–26 was now illustrated in his calling and forgiveness of Levi, the tax collector. Verses 27 ("Follow me") and

32 (“I have come to call ... to repentance”) form an inclusion in which the call to discipleship is emphasized. Luke made several important editorial modifications in this account, apart from various literary refinements and abbreviations. One is his addition of “left everything” (5:28). Another is his clarification that the call of Jesus is a call “to repentance” (5:32).

That Luke sought to defend the church’s practice of ministering to the outcasts is evident from his work, for he alone pointed out that the complaint of the Pharisees and scribes was directed to the disciples (5:30). As a result, the significance of this passage for the church in Luke’s day is all the more apparent. Yet it is much more likely that the church’s practice of fellowshiping with repentant sinners was the result of Jesus’ teachings and such incidents as this than that the church’s practice created this account.

Comments

5:27 Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi. In Matt 9:9 the name given to the tax collector was Matthew, and in all four lists of the twelve disciples the name Matthew appears. Although Mark and Luke did not equate Levi with Matthew, Matthew clearly did. Since first-century Jews often had two names (usually one in Hebrew or Aramaic and the other in Greek or Latin), there is no reason why this tax collector could not have been called Levi Matthew. For “tax collector” see comments on 3:12–13.

At his tax booth. Levi was not the chief toll collector but an agent working at a toll post, quite possibly in Capernaum.

Follow me. In Luke this phrase is used frequently to describe Christian discipleship (cf. 5:11; 9:23, 49, 57, 59, 61; 18:22, 28). This expression is not used here to describe a deeper Christian commitment to Jesus, i.e., entering some sort of second-level of discipleship, but rather the commitment to become a Christian, as is clear from 5:32.

5:28 Left everything. This is not found in the Markan and Matthean parallels. Luke added this to the narrative to clarify for his readers what it means to follow Jesus. This also ties the present account to the call of Simon, James, and John, who also “left everything and followed” (5:11). In 14:33 Jesus stated that one must “give up everything” to become a disciple, and there also this refers to becoming a Christian since it is addressed to the “crowds” and “anyone” (14:25–26). Elsewhere following Jesus involves denying oneself and taking up one’s cross daily (9:23) and leaving one’s house and family (9:57–62; 18:28). To such “poor” belong the kingdom of God (6:20).

And followed him. This is an inceptive imperfect and should be translated “and he began to follow him.” It emphasizes the commencement and continuation of Levi’s discipleship. Thus, the subsequent banquet should be understood as one of the ways Levi was following Jesus.

5:29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus. Luke alone designated this meal as a great banquet. This expression may come from Gen 21:8 (cf. also 26:30; Esther 1:3; 5:4, 8). Later Luke gave a parable of a great banquet (Luke 14:15–24) that was likewise filled with outcasts.

At his house. Luke clarified that the banquet was held in Levi’s house.

5:30 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect. The phrase is literally *the Pharisees and their scribes*. “Their” is somewhat strange, but it may be due to Mark’s unusual “and the scribes of the Pharisees” (Mark 2:16, RSV).

Complained. In Luke 15:1–2 we find a similar murmuring among the Pharisees and scribes, and in 19:7 they murmured because Jesus was eating with a sinner who was a chief tax collector.

To his disciples. This is the first use of “disciples” in the Gospel. The story may well have been remembered and preserved in the early church because of the criticism leveled against early

Christians who were associating and ministering to the outcasts of society. In addition, Luke's designating the disciples as the object of this complaint may seek to demonstrate that the present church situation of his readers has parallels to what happened to the disciples. The reason for this Christian behavior arose from incidents such as this in Jesus' life, not vice versa, i.e., the stories were not created by the early church to defend such behavior, but such behavior arose from Jesus' behavior and teachings. True Christianity has always broken down economic, social, ethnic, and racial barriers; for where Christ is truly present, "people will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (13:29).

Why do you eat and drink? This shared activity implied acceptance of such people as one's "brothers and sisters" (cf. Acts 11:3 and the explanation in 11:4–18, esp. 11:18; cf. also Gal 2:12–13). To "break bread" with someone had important consequences. Even as contact with lepers (Luke 5:12–16) brought ritual uncleanness, so in the minds of the Pharisees contact with tax collectors and sinners brought moral (as well as ritual) uncleanness.

With tax collectors and "sinners"? This association is also found in 7:34; 15:1–2. Gentiles could also be included under the latter term (Gal 2:15), but in the setting of Jesus "sinners" probably referred to those Jews who did not keep the Mosaic law's ceremonial details or its moral precepts, as interpreted by the Pharisees. "Tax collectors" are grouped with "sinners" not so much because they were "traitors" who collected taxes for the Roman oppressors but because they were dishonest and practiced distortion (cf. Luke 5:32). Note the advice of John the Baptist to them in 3:12–13, which assumes their dishonesty, and Zacchaeus's behavior in 19:8–9. The use of a single article, "the tax collectors and sinners," rather than "the tax collectors and the sinners" indicates that Luke saw them as making up a single group.

5:31 It is not the healthy. Luke used a more "medical" term here than we find in Mark and Matthew, although the NIV translates both terms identically. Compare 4:23. The metaphorical contrast between healthy and sick prepares the reader for the synonymous parallelism of righteous and sinners in the next verse.

5:32 This verse serves as the culmination of the account and as a clarification of 4:18–19.

I have ... come. Even as a doctor has a duty and calling to care for the sick, so Jesus has a calling to care for sinners.

Not ... to call the righteous. In light of the biblical teaching that there is none righteous (Rom 3:10–23) and that the call to repentance is universal (Luke 3:3; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30), "righteous" here should be understood as *those who falsely think themselves righteous*, i.e., the Pharisees. Luke did not raise the question here about whether the Pharisees were truly righteous, but later in Luke 16:15 he described them as "ones who justify [themselves] in the eyes of men" and in 18:9 as "confident of their own righteousness and look[ing] down on everyone else," i.e., as falsely assuming that they were righteous. Luke 15:7 should be interpreted similarly.

Sinners to repentance. Luke added this phrase to clarify what response sinners are to make to Jesus' gracious call. Repentance here corresponds to and is thus another way of expressing *leaving all and following Jesus* (5:28). Compare 15:7.