

Rediscover Jesus (Luke 4-9)

Part 7: “Jesus Calls Sinners” | Luke 5:27-32

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Today's sermon is from Luke 5:27-32 and is titled, “Jesus Calls Sinners.” We are on this journey of rediscovering the glory, beauty, wonder, and grace of Jesus Christ in this season of our church. We're doing this by studying the Gospel of Luke together. As we do this together as a church, we will learn how to be his disciples- faithful to him and fruitful in our lives.

What do you think are the foundational and intrinsic activities that characterize what a disciple of Jesus Christ does? Is it attending worship service? Is it serving in a ministry? Is it being involved in outreach? What I just mentioned are certainly important and you can probably think of a dozen other ideas. But the one activity that I'm thinking about as foundational and intrinsic is repentance.

“Repentance” literally means a turnaround: renouncing one's sinful way of life and turning towards trusting and following Jesus into the life that God gives which is true, full, and eternal. And repentance is not just what you do in the beginning when Jesus calls you; repentance is a lifelong part of following Jesus. As Martin Luther wrote in the first of his ninety-five theses: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.”

If you hear this, you might be like, “That sounds miserable” or “I don't want to always feel guilty,” thinking that repentance is a negative thing. It's not! Repentance leads to being *released* from the guilt of sin; repentance leads to experiencing the *joy* of God's salvation given to us by his grace! This is what this Scripture that I will be preaching from today explains as clear as day. I just hope I can present it clearly and faithfully!

Scripture Reading

At this time please find Luke 5:27-32 in your Bibles. Luke has been taking us through Jesus' early ministry in Galilee. Jesus had declared that he was the King of God's Kingdom that was promised in the Scriptures. He not only taught this persuasively, but he also verified his identity powerfully- through casting out demons and healing sick people. Just before this, Jesus healed a paralyzed man and forgave his sins. This got him in trouble with the Pharisees and scribes who began to watch him very carefully. This is what happened next. This is God's Word.

Luke 5:27-32 (ESV):

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.”

Amen!

Proposition

Here's the "one thing" for my sermon today- this is the main message from this Scripture:

Recognize Jesus' call for sinners to repent.

Organizational Statement

From Luke 5:27-32, we see three simple parts to Jesus' call to be his disciple- three phrases that Jesus says to us: first, "follow me" from verses 27-28; second, "invite others" from verses 29-30; and third, "repent" from verses 31-32.

Sermon Outline

I. [First, Jesus says to us...] "Follow Me" (vv. 27-28).

A. In verses 27-28, we see that Jesus called Levi the tax collector to follow him and he did so right away.

1. [Here is the first truth about Jesus' call to be his disciple from this part...] **Truth #1: Jesus' call to follow him always includes a changed life (27-28).**

Luke 5:27-28 (ESV): *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.*

- a) Levi was a tax collector, which meant that he collected taxes and customs on behalf of the Romans. In the ancient world, this job was always open to a lot of corruption. The Romans usually appointed tax collectors from among the indigenous population so that they could have local "insiders" pushing their agendas and doing their dirty work. Even worse, Jewish tax collectors were notorious for taking their own fees *on top of* the Roman-regulated taxes. So tax collectors were essentially betraying and robbing their own people! Furthermore, for very strict Jews, hatred for tax collectors was intensified by their certain ceremonial uncleanness due to their constant interaction with Gentiles. So the picture is clearly painted that Levi was a very shady person.
- b) This is what made Jesus' calling of Levi so confusing and so controversial (as we'll see later). Was *this* the kind of person Jesus wanted to be his disciple? Back in Jesus' day, prominent Jewish rabbis (or teachers) would extend invitations to others to learn under them. They would be his "disciples" (or students) who would apprentice and study from their rabbis. Rabbis would only invite people whom they deemed worthy of their privileged investment. Verse 27 is so brief and matter of fact: *After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."* But the good news is that no one is too sinful for Jesus to invite to be his disciple! No one has done "too many sins." No one sinned so badly that Jesus cannot forgive!
- c) In the midst of his skyrocketing popularity and fame in Galilee, Jesus stopped at a tax booth and decided that he wanted to invite this despised tax collector to be his disciple. It is almost certain that Levi had heard of

Jesus and listened to his teaching by this point. And the sense of privilege was not lost on Levi- verse 28 says this is how he responded to Jesus' invitation: *And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.* What caused Levi to react so dramatically? Remember, in the previous section, Luke presented the idea that Jesus is the King of God's Kingdom, who had the authority to forgive the sins of people. Then with this narrative to follow, Luke's point is that God forgives the sins of sinners- even sinners like Levi. And when Jesus forgives the sins of a sinner, the sinner is invited to be Jesus' disciple!

- d) If you remember, when Jesus called Simon Peter (5:1-11), he was ghastly aware that he was a sinner and he left everything to follow Jesus. And remember what happened last week? When Jesus healed the paralytic man *and* declared his sins forgiven, that man's life was literally transformed: he could walk and he recovered his ability to work, make a living for himself, and participate in the community. His life was undeniably different and he went off now, glorifying God with his life. I think that Luke is putting together a composite of what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus. Now Levi's call fills in more of the picture. Even though it says it very succinctly, Levi *changed*: he experienced a change of heart to trust Jesus as the authority to forgive sins and to be worthy of his entire life.
- e) I don't think we're *all* called to leave our jobs in order to follow Jesus, but for Levi this was the case. You see, if his whole identity before had to do with his life as a tax collector (which sadly seemed to be the case), his identity *now* was to be Jesus' apprentice- which meant to learn his teachings, follow his way of life, and trust him as Savior and King. His life was fundamentally changed. For Levi specifically, he was one of the twelve whom Jesus appointed as "apostles": disciples for most of his earthly ministry and eyewitnesses of his death and resurrection. Levi would be a pillar of the first church in Jerusalem and wrote the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew was Levi's Greek name). This was just the beginning of a lifetime of following Jesus!
2. [Let me repeat the first truth about Jesus' call to be his disciple again and talk a little bit more about it...] **Truth #1: Jesus' call to follow him always includes a changed life.**
- a) Let me be clear here: the "changed life" I'm talking about isn't *us* trying to change our lives, but *God* changing our hearts by his grace. When God saves someone, there is a logical order in a person (this is called the "order of salvation" in theological terms): God calls a person into his Kingdom (Romans 10:14-15), regenerates his heart-a spiritual "rebirth" (John 3:3-8), causes him to repent and have faith in Christ (1 Peter 1:23), and justifies him- making him righteous before God (Romans 5:1-10). It's this "regeneration" that Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18:
- o 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (NLT): *17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.*
- There is a definitive and fundamental change in a person whom Jesus calls to follow him- literally a "new person"!
- b) Context: Now, some of you might feel weird to be told this because you don't feel that you've changed too much or that you're changing fast enough. So first, let me encourage you that if you do have faith in Jesus,

you *are* a new creation, thus changed and changing. It may be hard for you to see, but be patient and trust God's words to be true. And also, it is a good chance for us all to examine our lives: Are you really following Jesus in your life? As Jesus said, "Anyone who comes after me must deny himself and take up his cross" (Matthew 16:24). Here's something that John Mark Comer wrote in his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, that is worth thinking about.

- o "We read the stories of Jesus- his joy, his resolute peace through uncertainty, his unanxious presence, his relaxed manner and how in the moment he was- and think, *I want that life*. We hear his open invite to 'life...to the full' and think, *Sign me up*. We hear about his easy yoke and soul-deep rest and think, *Gosh, yes, heck yes. I need that*. But then we're not willing to adopt his lifestyle. But in Jesus' case it is worth the cost. In fact, you get back far more than you give up. There's a cross, yes, a death, but it's followed by an empty tomb, a new portal to life. Because in the way of Jesus, death is always followed by resurrection." [John Mark Comer]

- c) Context: John Mark Comer then gave an illustration that explains his point. He writes about how in the early morning while he's drinking his morning coffee and looking outside, he sees his neighbors getting ready for their daily run. They look really good: lean, muscular, good posture. He thinks, "I want that," but then thinks about the lifestyle behind it- and what he'd need to give up: Netflix until late night, eating freely and enjoyable, and the comfort of spending mornings in his pajamas. He wants the life but is not willing to adopt the lifestyle behind it. The point is this: Jesus' call to follow him always includes a changed life. While it's a work of God's grace, from our side we make the choices of following Jesus' way of life: Is how I work the way of Jesus? Is how I relate to people the way of Jesus? Is what I prioritize in my days and weeks the way of Jesus? Is what I do to steward my body and money and time the way of Jesus? Are my heart's affections and desires the way of Jesus? I'd like for us to wrestle honestly with these questions. And if you're feeling a bit in despair- I'm not going to leave you hanging for too long. Just wait until we get to part 3.

II. [Second, Jesus says to us...] "Invite Others" (vv. 29-30)

- A. In verses 29-30, we see that Levi hosted a great feast for Jesus and invited many of his friends to meet Jesus.

- 1. [Here is the second truth about Jesus' call to be his disciple from this part...]
Truth #2: Jesus' disciples honor him by introducing others to him (29-30).

Luke 5:29-30 (ESV): 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?"*

- a) As I go through this part, think about who you identify with the most among the people in this scene. Maybe you can relate with Levi and his friends. Levi must have understood the incredible grace that Jesus extended to him- that's why it says in v. 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*. The privilege of being invited to be a disciple was not lost on Levi- he wanted to repay the honor. As a well-to-do man (as a tax collector), he did what was pretty common for the culture in

first-century Israel: he threw a huge party at his house! He invited his friends, colleagues (former colleagues, that is), and subordinates to this “great feast.” This kind of table fellowship was a special way to honor someone (he wanted to honor Jesus) and to enjoy a close, intimate time with loved ones.

- b) Can you imagine how he invited his friends? “Hey guys, have you heard of that guy Jesus who is teaching powerfully and healing all sorts of people? *That* guy invited *me* to be his disciple! Now I’m throwing a party at my house because I want you to get to know him too!” Levi understood that grace is more enjoyed and celebrated when more people know about it and experience it for themselves. So he introduced his friends to Jesus! Listen carefully: table fellowship in the ancient world signified mutual acceptance and close friendship. So Jesus and Levi sharing the table together and also sharing the table with Levi’s friends was *extremely* significant!
- c) So who were in Levi’s social circle? Who were his friends, colleagues, and subordinates? As I mentioned, it was this big group of tax collectors, of course! These were the guys that he worked with, hung out with, and shared life with! There were “others” mentioned too- other people of comparably bad reputations who they also worked with, hung out with, and shared life with: morally loose people, Gentile counterparts, and other people that good, religious Jews would never associate with in the first century! Levi’s friends were accepted by Jesus too: to eat together, have conversations, laugh and joke, and maybe even receive teaching. I’m sure there was a bit of all of the above at this party. For Levi’s guests, their conduct at a party was probably what you would expect (like maybe drinking a bit too much or using crass language), but Jesus and his disciples weren’t going crazy like that.
- d) Maybe you can identify more with the Pharisees and disciples. Verse 30 says, *And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”* Do you remember who the Pharisees and scribes were from last week? The Pharisees were a sect within Judaism that wanted to keep the nation of Israel faithful to God by strictly keeping the Law of Moses. The “teachers of the law” were also known as scribes- those who studied and interpreted the Law of Moses. These two groups of people developed what is known as the “traditions”: the system of specific rules that were applied to the Law. So in sum, the Pharisees and scribes were the leader and guardians of Israel’s religion. Just like before, they didn’t bring up their concerns with Jesus directly- they “grumbled at his disciples.” This word “grumbling” was what the Israelites did in the wilderness way back in Genesis. It was this questioning of God and hardening of their hearts.
- e) Now think about these other disciples (the ones Jesus’ had first called) for a bit: they were probably super uncomfortable and uncertain about this situation. Remember, Jesus’ first disciples were fishermen- common, blue-collar, not-so-educated folks. But they were still devoted to their Jewish culture and religion and zealously loyal to the nation of Israel (unlike the tax collectors who were considered traitors). They probably were wondering, “What are we doing here with *these* people?” But then they would’ve looked at Jesus and thought, “Well it seems like Jesus really *loves* being with these people.” And finally they would’ve looked at the Pharisees and scribes- people who carried a lot of weight in their society- frowning on this whole situation and worry, “If *these guys* disapprove, shouldn’t we?”. They

had to wonder if they were following the right guy: Jesus or these established Jewish authorities?

2. [Let me repeat the second truth about Jesus' call to be his disciple again and talk a little bit more about it...] **Truth #2: Jesus' disciples honor him by introducing others to him.**
 - a) Context: You can be honest- who do you identify with here in this scene? Maybe you identify with Levi and his friends here because you've never fit into "religious" circles. You've often felt judged or just uncomfortable with them. What I'd like to say is, "Welcome! I'm happy that you're learning about Jesus today!" Maybe you identify with the Pharisees and disciples because you are kind of "judge-y" towards people from other religions or people who have a reputation that is "wild" or "shady" or "questionable." You can't help but think how different they are than you in what they do for fun, the way they talk, or the reputation they have. I don't think it's a spoiler here to say that Levi is the model of someone who experiences God's gracious call and change of heart and then honors Jesus by introducing his friends- also "sinners"- to him.
 - b) Context: For new Christians, this comes naturally because the good news is still fresh and most of their friends are still not Christians either. But the longer we're Christians, we have more prominent relationships with fellow Christians (which is a good thing). But it seems to get harder to relate more authentically and deeply with non-Christians, doesn't it? I think of it as similar to this: When I was a kid, I didn't want to invite my friends from school to my house to play (which was unusual because it was normal to do so). The two big reasons that I was so *malu* were that I was always insecure that others' houses were so much better (in other words, I envied their lives) and that I was always worried of Americans meeting my Korean parents (in other words, I worried they'd think my culture was weird). I'm pretty ashamed that I felt this way as now I know that I didn't need to be shy about my beautiful culture and my friends' home lives were not that great (even though they had a lot of stuff). In fact, introducing my friends would've *honored* my parents!
 - c) Context: It's the same reasons we're a bit *malu* about introducing others to Jesus, isn't it? Sometimes we actually *envy* the lives of non-Christians- if we're honest- and think they have it better than us. Sometimes we are embarrassed about our church- its messiness and strangeness. But what I'd exhort us to do as followers of Christ is to be intentional to introduce others to the Jesus that is in the Scriptures- the one who *loves* "table fellowship" with us and other sinners like us! This is how we honor the Lord! Paul says this after he talked about how God makes people new creations in Christ:
 - o 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT): 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

We are the Jesus' representatives in the world because we also want our friends and loved ones to come back to God. And actually, when we interact meaningfully with people who are not Christians, it does help us to see the gospel in a new light: you have to be real; you have to struggle with what you really believe, you see how meaningless and painful life is apart from God, and you have to examine the truth of your own belief system. These are all really good for us, really good witness to others, and honors Jesus!

III. [Third, Jesus says to us...] “Repent” (31-32)

A. In verses 31-32, we see that Jesus explained to the Pharisees and scribes that his mission was to call sinners to repentance.

1. [Here is the third truth about Jesus’ call to be his disciple from this part...] **Truth #3: Jesus’ mission is to call sinners to repentance in him (31-32).**

Luke 5:31-32 (ESV): *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.”*

- a) Even though the Pharisees and scribes pointed their question to the disciples, Jesus is the one who piped up and responded to them. Jesus gave a very simple analogy here in verses 31-32: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”* It wouldn’t make any sense for a healthy person to go to the hospital or subject himself to something like surgery. But listen carefully to the flip side of this because it’s super-duper important: Those with a life-threatening condition (like cancer or heart disease) absolutely need to undergo whatever treatment needed (medication, surgery, or chemotherapy) in order to be healed. In the same way, Jesus is the Great Physician who has come because we have a really serious condition- our sin and unrighteousness- and who provides a definitive, life-saving solution.
- b) To help us feel this a bit more, you know about the great flood during Noah’s time (it’s in the Bible in Genesis 6), right? The Lord decided to flood the earth as his judgment upon the wickedness of humanity. He commanded Noah to build an ark (a huge boat)- like 150m long, 25m wide, 15m high- and when Noah obeyed, people mocked him and thought he was crazy! They didn’t see any need for this ark in the middle of the land and with normal rainfall. But when it rained for forty days and forty nights, submerging the world in water, it was too late! A giant lifeboat didn’t make sense at all until people were drowning in the deluge! And no one could swim well enough to survive the great flood! The point is that all people will face judgment before God who is holy. No matter if you are a Pharisee, a fisherman, or a tax collector, they all need to know their great need for a lifeboat, a physician, and a Savior!
- c) Jesus specifically said that he came to “call” sinners to repentance. As I said before, the call to follow Jesus- as Levi had done- included the crucial step of “repentance.” This word literally means “change of mind”: it meant realizing the folly of our sinful ways, trusting that Jesus is God’s provision to save us from our sins, and deciding to follow Jesus as the King of our hearts and lives from now on. Remember who Jesus claimed to be when he kicked off his public ministry in his hometown synagogue (4:16-30)? He was the King of God’s Kingdom who was proclaiming good news to the poor in righteousness, freedom to captives to sin, sight to the spiritually blind, and forgiveness of the debts of sinners!
- d) Think about what Jesus had done so far. He healed a leper by reaching out and touching him- he was willing and able to do so (5:12-16). He healed a paralyzed man and declared that his sins were forgiven- the miracle was a sign of who Jesus truly was, the Son of Man who would be the substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world (5:17-26). And now Luke added another layer to his presentation of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ:

when God works in a heart like this and calls him to follow Jesus, then sinners are healed of their sin-sickness; they are forgiven of their sins and made right with God. This was what had been such good news to Levi- he knew that this was him!

- e) But Jesus also was making a specific point to the Pharisees and scribes here: people have to see their need for the Great Physician. Jesus is making an ironic point here: the sick are aware of their serious and real need for a doctor- just like the poor are aware of their serious and real need for money; captives are aware of their serious and real need for freedom; the blind are aware of their serious and real need for sight; and those in debt are aware of their serious and real need for forgiveness. The tragedy here is that the Pharisees and scribes saw themselves as *already* righteous and in no need for a King who would have to die on the cross for their sins. In fact, the very idea that Jesus would have to do this was *offensive* to them because they didn't see themselves in the same category as tax collectors and other "sinners"!
2. [Let me repeat the third and final truth about Jesus' call to be his disciple again and talk a little bit more about it...] **Truth #3: Jesus' mission is to call sinners to repentance in him.**
- a) This brings everything together towards the main message of this Scripture to recognize Jesus' call for sinners to repent. Jesus' mission was to save sinners. He did this by sacrificing his life on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins instead of us. Through this action, our sins are cleansed and forgiven and we are made right with God- credited with Christ's righteousness in place of our sinfulness. It was never, ever *our own* righteousness that earned any merit from God (for you Pharisees out there). There is no sin too great or person so sinful that Jesus' sacrifice isn't enough (for you tax collectors out there). Jesus calls sinners- that means *all* of us- to repentance and faith in himself for this changed life!
- b) Context: So let me address those who are not yet Christians here: Whether Pharisee or tax collector, religious or sinner, you need to acknowledge your need for Jesus to save you from your sins and to put your faith in Jesus as the only way to God's salvation. As you respond to that call, the Holy Spirit regenerates your heart to now repent and have faith in him. You will experience a changed life! If you sense Jesus calling you to follow him and to repent, the Holy Spirit is working in you right now! Make sure you tell others: tell your Christian friends here to help you grow in the Lord now and tell your non-Christian friends that need to know who Jesus truly is! Now let me address those who are Christians already here because it is important for us to keep "growing spiritually." But what I mean by this might be different than you expect. What I mean by this isn't *just* learning more Bible (although good), participating in church more (although good), or reaching out more (although good).
- c) Context: What I mean primarily about "growing spiritually" is becoming more aware of our sinfulness (how deep that rabbit hole of depravity runs in our hearts), fathoming further God's holiness (how limitless the perfect righteousness and justice of God is), and grasping the great sacrifice by which Jesus loves us! This is how the apostle Paul describes it- this is a fantastic "life verse" for all of us too:
- o Philippians 3:8-9 (CEV): *8 Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ 9 and to know that I belong to him. I could*

not make myself acceptable to God by obeying the Law of Moses. God accepted me simply because of my faith in Christ.

There is nothing as awesome as being a disciple of Jesus Christ- being with him personally and intimately and following his ways. Other sources of righteousness (like in the Pharisees' cases) or other sources of pleasure (like in the tax collectors' cases) become less and less- it becomes more like garbage compared to what Christ offers in his call to follow him! We recognize Jesus' call for sinners like us to repent- and it's a *joyful* life! It's joyful to catch ourselves when we fall into those broken idols that leave us empty, repent towards Jesus, and experience his change in our lives. It's joyful to introduce Jesus to our friends and loved ones- although sometimes uncomfortable or difficult- so we can see Jesus do his life-changing work in them too!

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

- A. Here are two questions for us to ponder and to take steps towards, in light of us **recognizing Jesus' call for sinners (like all of us) to repent!**
1. First, in what ways can you practice repentance in your life?
 - a) Especially during this Lent season, make some margin in your life to implement repentance into your walk with the Lord Jesus. For example, I'm trying to spend more time in the evenings to reflect as part of my bedtime routine- reflecting on if my heart and actions have been consistent with the way of Jesus. What are some ways you can make some margin in your life to do this? Also, invite others into your life to encourage and challenge you to see if your heart and actions are consistent with the way of Jesus. Especially if what they say is hard for you to swallow- don't be offended or hurt- but reflect for yourself and repent for the sins the Holy Spirit convicts you of.
 2. Second, who are some people that you can introduce to Jesus?
 - a) We need to recognize that they need Jesus too! Create margin in your life during this Lent season to also build relationships with friends, family, and neighbors who need Jesus. There are *definitely* people around you that God has put you in your sphere of influence: be prayerful (pray for them and pray for God to give you ideas), initiate new and deeper relationships, and humbly share your life with them (not just the "good" stuff, but the stuff that requires you to honestly wrestle and struggle with the Lord).

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