



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 5:27-32

To learn more about Jesus' call of Levi (Matthew).

A Hospital Church

In 1984, Cornerstone Baptist church called its first full-time Senior Pastor. As a plant out of Sagamore Hill Baptist church starting in 1982, Cornerstone was comprised of several solid families looking to establish a presence on the Eastside of Fort Worth. Two years in, they were ready to take things to the next level; James Reeves was the guy they selected to lead the charge. They grew leaps and bounds in the next years, and by the early 90's looked like any other successful Southern Baptist church in Texas. That is, until Dr. Reeves had a hard awakening to his reality; he was broken and needed healing. "I am five-foot-eleven and weigh about 150 pounds. During this period I dropped to 130. I couldn't sleep at night but strangely longed to crawl in bed and sleep all the time. Yet I continued to muddle through my responsibilities by sheer force of will."¹ After a crash and burn on a Sunday morning, Dr. Reeves opted to resign shortly thereafter, but was convinced to take a Sabbatical instead. It was during this time Cornerstone, now renamed Celebration Baptist, took on the moniker that it has kept to the present day: "The Hospital Church."

It isn't uncommon, at least in the Bible Belt, for church to be the last place you want to get things wrong. And yet, in Luke chapter 5, Jesus hits us with these stark words: "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's a paradigm shift to the modern church. The mission of Jesus is not to make great people feel great about how great they are,

¹ James M. Reeves. *Refuge: How the Hospital Church Ministry Can Change Your Life Forever*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 24.

but to bring love, grace, and mercy to those who are in touch with just how lost and sick they've always been. That is the ministry that churches ought to model. A ministry that offers the help, hope, and healing of Jesus.

Levi

Verse 27 introduces a new character, a man by the name of "Levi." The Gospel According to Matthew presents this same calling in Matthew 9:9, but a different name is used: "As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him." It can be gathered from assimilating the information from all three synoptic Gospels together that Levi is, in fact, the same Matthew who penned The Gospel According to Matthew. Below are a few details about him.

A TAX COLLECTOR

Matthew's profession was that of a tax collector, a job that would have made him a sort of social pariah. Tax collectors were seen as soulless Jews, sold out for an evil Roman Empire. It's interesting, then, that Luke employs the Greek term θεάομαι (theaomai) for the word "saw." It's a word that means "gazing into with discernment," something much more than surface level seeing. In other words, Jesus wasn't looking suspiciously at Matthew in the same way much of society looked at him, but rather with the intent of seeing the real person underneath the job. Jesus simply says to him, "Follow me." It's a remarkably simple and yet powerful invitation from the Lord Jesus, and one that Matthew does not deliberate over at all: "And leaving everything, he rose and followed him" (Lk. 5:28). This, in short, depicts the proper response to the Gospel. When someone receives the Gospel invitation with faith, it calls them to leave behind their former identity and way of thinking and acting, and walking in the new identity given by the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17).

A DECENT LIVING

The tax collecting job was apparently a rather fruitful career. The further response of Levi was not merely to leave everything behind, but verse 29 says: "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." To prepare a feast of this size with this many people in a house that was large enough to host it indicates that Matthew was not hurting financially. He had the means to be able to celebrate with this kind of intensity, and he did. It also appears that perhaps there was an evangelistic sense to this meal as well, in that many other social rejects like himself were invited to meet Jesus. Again, a picture of the broader Christian faith can be seen here. Whenever someone comes to faith, there should follow a desire for other people to meet Jesus, too.

A LEGENDARY ENDING

Very little is said of Matthew after this instance. In fact, the other time he is mentioned by name is in Acts 1:13: "When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James." However, history tells us Matthew lived some years as an apostle after this, and it is believed that he went as a missionary to the Persians, Parthians, and Medes. There is even a legend that he died as a martyr in Ethiopia, but none of these details are biblically confirmed, and thus should be treated as any other non-biblical ancient history.

The Righteous and The Sick

This meal prepared by Matthew that Jesus attended was not well-received by the religious leaders of this time. Recall that in the previous passage, the Pharisees and religious leaders show up to see Jesus for the first recorded time (Lk. 5:17). Now, after having marveled at His teaching (Lk. 5:26), they are questioning His

decision to eat with sinners: “And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners” (Lk. 5:30). It is here that Jesus unfolds the driving philosophy behind His ministry: “And Jesus answered them, “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” (Lk. 5:31-32).

There is something almost sarcastic in the tone of Jesus’ statement in verse 31. “Those who are well” don’t actually exist in the real world. All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). Jesus is well aware of this. More accurately, He is speaking of those who *believe they are well* and are either *unaware* that they are not, or *unwilling* to acknowledge it. In other words, He is (in true Jesus fashion) attacking the heart. Jesus does not come to appeal to those who believe they are doing well, but to those who are aware of their shortcomings, misgivings, and sin. The physician will only heal those who are sick!

That Jesus’ ministry is built on calling people to repentance should not be surprising; He called people to repent regularly (Matt. 3:8; 4:17; Lk. 3:13; Mk. 1:15), and so did His apostles (Acts 3:19; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Jn. 1:9; Rom. 2:4). That means, however, that this approach to call sinners to repentance massively important in how biblical anthropology is understood. People are not inherently good, nor are they born as “blank slates” (or *Tabula Rasa*, a la Descartes). People are born with sin. This is not even debatable. What is debatable is how aware and willing to acknowledge their lowly state they really are. When a person is willing to affirm their sinful state, then and only then will Jesus’ good news (Gospel) really be anything good. This is why, with every presentation of the Gospel, sin must be addressed. The Physician only calls sinners to repentance, and no one else.

What About Now?

The obvious takeaway for the church today is to recognize this reality and become the hospital where the Great Physician does His work. It means churches must be willing to speak against self-righteous religiosity, and welcome the broken sinner with shame or condemnation, but also with a willingness to call them to repentance. Usually churches either shun the sinner, or welcome them with no other call to action. Both are wrong. The sinner must be welcome to hear the Gospel, and they must also be called to repentance.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 5:27. Where did Jesus go and who did He see? What was this person’s job?

2. Read Luke 5:27. What is the significance of the verb “saw?” (Hint: See above notes) What did Jesus say to him?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 5:28. How did Levi respond?

2. Read Luke 5:29. What else did Levi do in response to Jesus' call? What does this say about his financial well-being?
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Day Three

1. Read Luke 5:30. Who grumbled at this feast, and what did they say?
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2. Read Luke 5:31. What was Jesus' response to the Pharisees?
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 5:32. What does Jesus say here? Summarize it in your own words.
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2. Read Luke 5:32. Are there really any righteous people? If not, what does Jesus mean by this? (Hint: See above notes)
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Week 18 Discussion: The Great Physician

In Luke 5:31-32, Jesus proclaims: "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." If this is the case, the church ought to be a place that is comfortable for sinners to come and confess, and miserable for the self-righteous. Talk as a group about the importance of the church being a safe place for you to get it wrong.

1. Icebreaker: Is your church a safe place? If so, why do you think so? If not, why not?
2. Do you identify more with the righteous or the sinner? Be honest.
3. In what areas of life do you exhibit self-righteous behavior?
4. In what areas of life are you in touch with the fact that you're a sinner?
5. Who are other "tax collectors" that you could invite to meet Jesus?
6. How can the church be an even safer place?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus called Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, to follow Him.
2. Jesus' call to repentance is for the sinner, not the self-righteous.