

Luke 5:27-32

"The Right Diagnosis"

July 21, 2024

1. Intro

- a. It's difficult for us here in America to understand how appalling the role of a tax collector was in 1st century Israel
 - i. I think it's safe to say that none of us are very big fans of the IRS
 1. No one has ever LIKED paying taxes... so naturally those who are tasked with collecting those taxes are not seen in a very favorable light
 - a. But I think, hopefully, that at the end of the day we realize that those who work for the IRS in our day are really just ordinary citizens trying to make a living
 - b. If a new family were to move in on our block, and in the course of our conversation with them we find out that the dad works for the IRS...
 - i. We might cringe a little bit, or even jokingly give him a hard time
 1. But we would again, hopefully, never shun him as a traitor to everything we hold dear
 - ii. This was not the case for tax collectors in Jesus' day
 1. As we've mentioned many times before in our study of Luke, the nation of Israel was an occupied territory
 - a. They were fully under the rule and reign of the Roman Empire, as was most of Europe, parts of Western Asia, and even parts of Northern Africa
 - i. The Roman Empire was a MASSIVE empire
 1. But they didn't just rule with an iron fist from Rome
 - a. They also helped unite all of these countries with an incredible system of interconnected roads, some of which are still being used today
 - b. They invested countless quantities of money building up key cities throughout the empire...
 - i. Building lavish citadels
 - ii. Creating expansive libraries and theaters
 - iii. And even bringing water to areas that had been dry and arid, through the construction of the famous aqueducts
 - c. On top of all of this, the armies of Rome were large and well-equipped, as they were responsible for not just conquering new lands, but also maintaining law and order in the lands already under Roman rule
2. Obviously, all of these things cost money, right?
 - a. And so, the Romans, being very shrewd in their dealings with all of these new subjects, began to implement the role of the publican in each of these territories...
 - i. Tax collectors who were set up in foreign cities to extract the money the Empire needed to function
 1. But instead of sending men from Rome to do this job, the Roman government instead hired local men to fill this role

2. And to incentivize them to do their job well, Rome turned and looked the other way when these tax collectors charged MORE than what was owed, and kept the extra for themselves
 - a. This was a regular practice for tax collectors throughout the Roman Empire
 - b. And Judea was no exception
- ii. We get the impression from the Gospels that there were quite a few tax collectors throughout Judea in those days
 1. And there is no doubt left at all in the Scriptures... these men were despised by their fellow Jews
 - a. Not only were these tax collectors serving the Empire that was occupying their own nation
 - b. But these tax collectors were often excessively greedy, and ridiculously wealthy
 - i. In a time when many throughout Judea were struggling financially, the pocketbooks of these publicans were fat and overflowing
3. This is why verse 27 of Luke 5 is so incredibly stunning...

2. Luke 5:27

- a. *27After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."*
 - i. We need to stop for a moment, and try to read this verse from the perspective of its original reader
 1. Remember, Luke compiled all of his Gospel as a historical account of Jesus' life for just one man... most excellent Theophilus
 - a. Theophilus was likely an aristocrat in one of the major cities of the Roman empire
 - b. If he wasn't a Christian already, it's clear that he had some sort of interest in Christianity
 - i. And so Luke put all of this book together, as well as the book of Acts, so that Theophilus could be more certain about the things he had been taught
 2. So, assuming Theophilus doesn't know a whole lot about Jesus' disciples, he gets to this verse that says, "Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi... and he said to him, 'Follow me.'"
 - a. You have to wonder if Theophilus' jaw dropped at this point
 - i. We've probably all read a book at one time or another, where the story is going on as expected, and then all of a sudden the author drops a HUGE plot twist into the story that just changes everything
 1. And you're just left sitting there saying, "Whoa... I didn't see THAT coming!"
 - a. We've been watching as the power of God has been made manifest in Jesus these past few weeks
 - i. Jesus has been casting out demons
 - ii. He's been healing the multitudes of their diseases
 - iii. He's proclaimed the Word of God with power
 - b. The trajectory of this story has moving on a pretty fast-paced, upward trend
 - i. But now Jesus stops at a tax collector's booth of all places

1. And he says to the man sitting there – the man despised as a traitor, a cheat, a greedy thief – he says to Levi, “Follow me.”
- c. Well, the only thing more stunning and unexpected than Jesus’ words and actions were the actions of Levi himself!

3. Luke 5:28

a. ²⁸*And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.*

- i. We heard these same words a few weeks ago when we talked about Peter’s call to follow Christ
 1. After the miraculous catch of fish out on the lake of Gennesaret, Luke tells us that Peter and James and John left everything to follow Jesus
 - a. But if you remember, these guys already had somewhat of a history with Jesus
 - i. They had likely already been with him when he performed his first miracles, and they had already spent considerable time with him, listening to him teach and preach
 1. While their commitment to Jesus to leave everything and follow after him is certainly courageous and inspiring, it was at least based on some prior relationship
- ii. But we don’t get any indication here, or in Matthew and Mark’s account of this event, that Levi had had any previous interactions with Jesus
 1. And yet, when Jesus called him, Levi left EVERYTHING
 - a. He left the life of wealth and extravagance he had become accustomed to
 - b. He left the security of his position of power within the Roman Empire
 - c. He left quite possibly his only remaining source of identity for who he was anymore
 2. He left everything, and he followed after Jesus
 - a. We don’t get any clear mention of when or why Levi became known as Matthew
 - i. There isn’t any record in the Scriptures like there was when Abram was renamed Abraham, or Jacob was renamed Israel, or Simon was renamed Peter
 1. But most commentators believe that Jesus at some point very early on after Levi’s call, gave to him the name Matthew, which means “Gift of God”
 - a. In fact, the next time Luke mentions Levi will be in chapter 6, when Jesus chooses his 12 disciples
 - b. And in verse 15, Levi is now called Matthew
 2. The one who was once despised, is now through the grace of God known as the GIFT of God
3. This change in Matthew’s heart was immediate... but apparently Matthew still had one thing left to do before he actually left EVERYTHING
 - a. He threw Jesus a party
 - i. And he invited the only “friends” he knew

4. Luke 5:29

a. 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.*

- i. Now for whatever reason, Luke is a little more gracious in his account here than Matthew and Mark were

1. In both Matthew and Mark's account, they don't just say that there was a large company of tax collectors and OTHERS at this feast
 - a. They very clearly and unapologetically say, there were many tax collectors and SINNERS at this feast
 - i. This word for "sinners" carries with it the idea of those who were "stained with certain definite vices"
 1. These were the tax collectors...
 2. The prostitutes...
 3. In the eyes of the Jewish people, these were the heathen, the unclean that dwelled in the midst of their society
 - b. Who else would Matthew have invited??
 - i. Everyone else in Judea looked upon him with hatred in their eyes
 - ii. So Matthew invited all of his fellow rejects to the party
 1. And Luke tells us that it was a GREAT feast with LOTS of people
2. In a very real sense, this was not just Matthew inviting others to meet Jesus – it was his farewell party as well
 - a. Matthew would spend the next two years or so following Christ, until Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven
 - i. Undoubtedly he remained with the Apostles in Jerusalem for many years after Pentecost, serving as a witness to all he had seen and heard
 - ii. At some point, he would eventually compose his own Gospel account of the life of Jesus
 1. Which it's interesting to note that most scholars believe that Matthew wrote his Gospel specifically to his Jewish countrymen
 - a. Matthew had spent many years as a traitor to his own people
 - b. It's almost as if his writing to them of the Good News of Jesus Christ was a way of expressing recompense for all that he had done before Christ called him
 2. We don't know much about Matthew's later life
 - a. There are some traditions that hold that he would eventually leave Jerusalem and go to Ethiopia, where he would plant a church, and eventually be martyred for his faith
 3. But whatever the details were, this great feast was Matthew's last big hurrah before he left it all
 - b. Even so, I do not believe that was his PRIMARY intention for this great feast
 - i. I believe that Matthew wanted all of his fellow rejects and outcasts to meet this new religious leader who had chosen him of all people
 1. I believe Matthew wanted them to see, "If this Jesus can choose ME, a worthless tax collector, then he can choose YOU as well!"
 - ii. Friends, there is a beautiful application for us in Matthew's example, isn't there?
 1. There is certainly a place in the church for outreach events, and street evangelism, and even going door-to-door with the Gospel

- a. But, the most effective proclamation of the Gospel happens right within our own circles of relationships that already exist
 - i. Who are the people you work with every day?
 - ii. Who are the people you interact with each week at the grocery store, or the gas station, or the bank?
 - iii. Who are those you sit next to at your kids' ball games or dance recitals?
- 3. Matthew didn't go run out into the street and say, "Hey, whoever wants to come to my house for a party, let's go!"
 - a. He went and got his fellow tax collectors
 - b. He went and got his fellow sinners
 - i. And he invited them to meet Jesus
 - ii. He invited them to meet the one who had called him to follow HIM
- 4. Unfortunately, these were not the only ones at the party...

5. Luke 5:30

- a. ³⁰*And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*
 - i. Jesus just couldn't get rid of these guys, could he?
 - 1. We saw last week that these Pharisees and scribes had gathered from all around Galilee and Judea, and even from Jerusalem
 - a. These men couldn't believe that Jesus kept breaking the Sabbath to heal people
 - b. Even worse, they were absolutely appalled at the fact that he was saying that God was his Father
 - i. And so, even now, just a year or so into his public ministry, these religious leaders were already seeking to kill him
 - 2. And here they are in Matthew's house – most likely uninvited – and they grumbled at Jesus' disciples...
 - a. "Why do you all eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"
 - i. You can feel the judgment in their words, can't you?
 - 1. "Why do you associate with the filth of our society?"
 - 2. "Why are you in the house of this man who is stained with sin?"
 - 3. "Why are you reclining and eating with these HEATHENS?"
 - 3. The question was directed at the disciples, but Jesus immediately gave them his answer...

6. Luke 5:31

- a. ³¹*And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*
 - i. We've already seen in previous weeks that Jesus came in the power of God to be the great healer of his people
 - 1. He cast out their demons
 - 2. He healed them from their leprosy
 - 3. He made the lame walk and the blind to see
 - a. Jesus was indeed the Great Physician who had come to bring physical healing to the people of Israel
 - i. And so he drops some pretty basic common sense upon them...

1. “Healthy people don’t need doctors – it is those who are sick that need the care of a physician”
 - a. We have some good friends who are medical professionals...
 - i. They lament the fact that this is the reality they have to deal with
 - ii. It would be awesome if people would come to them BEFORE they got sick, so they could educate them on how to keep their bodies healthy and prevent so many illnesses and diseases
 2. But that’s just not the way it works, is it?
 - a. We ALL put off going to the doctor, until we are IN NEED of their help
 - i. Things haven’t changed much in two thousand years, have they?
4. So the Pharisees and Scribes ask why Jesus and his disciples are hanging out with a bunch of sinners, and Jesus says to them, “It is because THEY are the ones who TRULY need me.”
 - a. But hold up...
 - i. There are no lepers at Matthew’s house
 - ii. As far as we know, there are no blind people, or paralytics
 - iii. There’s no indication that anyone at this party is sick
 1. So what is Jesus talking about?
 - a. In our final verse in this passage, we get our clarification
 - b. And it is a reminder that we as a church desperately need to hear
 - b. Jesus says in verse 31, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”
 - i. And then in verse 32 he says,

7. Luke 5:32

a. ³²*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*

- i. A first glance, it almost feels as if Jesus is making two, completely unconnected statements here
 1. First, he was talking about sick people needing a doctor
 - a. But now he’s talking about sinners needing to repent?
 2. Jesus certainly had the power to heal sicknesses and diseases and all sorts of physical ailments, but as we mentioned a few weeks ago...
 - a. Everyone that Jesus healed, all eventually died, didn’t they?
 - i. Jesus didn’t give to ANYONE the power to live forever in these earthly tents
 - ii. Yes, in his kindness and his compassion and his mercy, he took away their momentary afflictions
 1. But all of their bodies eventually wore out, didn’t they?
 - b. And this serves as a reminder for us that our ULTIMATE need is the healing of our souls
 - i. It is the forgiveness of our sins, as we repent and surrender our lives to Jesus as Lord

1. It is THEN that our old hearts of stone will be removed
 2. And the Spirit will cause us to be born again
 3. And our hearts will be made NEW!
3. Once we have received THAT treatment, then it matters not what happens with these earthly bodies of ours
 - a. In fact, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 that it's actually a BETTER testimony to the power of God when we are NOT doing well as the world defines it...
 - i. *⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*
 - b. Friends, we are ALL dying
 - i. Each of our bodies has a predetermined shelf life... every one of our days are numbered
 1. Saint and sinner alike, we are ALL on the same road to the grave
 - a. But what Paul is saying is that the Christian walks this road MUCH differently than everyone else
 - b. For the Christian has HOPE
 - i. Yes, we are afflicted in these jars of clay, but we are not crushed
 - ii. Yes, we are perplexed by the things that we have to deal with in this life, but we do not despair
 - iii. Yes, we are even persecuted and struck down, but our great hope is this: we will NEVER be forsaken... we will NEVER be destroyed
 - ii. For as we have been united with Christ in his death, so also will we be united with him in LIFE
 1. For the Great Physician has healed our SOUL
8. This is why it is crucial that we as a church are consistent in leading people to the right diagnosis for their SPIRITUAL sickness
 - a. Sadly, there seems to be so much confusion in the church these days regarding this central truth
 - i. We are hearing of more and more churches stepping away from any talk of sin or repentance
 - ii. That's not a very popular thing to talk about with non-believers, so let's drop all of that kind of language
 1. One well-known and highly influential pastor said this in an interview with CBS on Easter morning...
 - a. "Most people are beaten down enough by life. They already feel guilt enough. So I want them to come to my church and be lifted up. I want them to be able to say, 'You know what? I may not be perfect, but I'm moving forward. I'm doing better.' And I think that motivates you to do better."
 - i. Let's not beat people up with talk of sin and a need for repentance
 - ii. Just lift people up, and they'll eventually start doing better
 - b. Friends, this is the wrong diagnosis

- i. This pastor has diagnosed that our most pressing problem is that we have a low self-esteem
 - ii. And in order to treat people's low self-esteem, we just need to help them think better of themselves
 - 1. But doesn't Paul say that "ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."?
 - 2. Doesn't Paul say that ALL of us were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, and malice, and that we ALL deserve to die?
 - a. A better self-esteem is NOT the answer
 - b. The wrong diagnosis... leads to the wrong treatment, doesn't it?
2. There is another well-known and highly influential pastor who has said that the church must unhitch ourselves from all the old baggage and legalism of the Old Testament
 - a. Those stories about how God showed his wrath and judgement against the wicked aren't helpful in leading others to Christ, so we don't need to talk about them anymore
 - b. Non-Christians can't understand how God created the heavens and the earth in seven days, or that sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's transgressions, so let's stop teaching these things as if they were fact
 - c. Those in the LGBTQ community are turned off by all of those "clobber verses" the church uses to say their lifestyle choice is a sin, so let's not use those verses in our churches if we really want to reach them
 - i. Again, he's got the wrong diagnosis, doesn't he?
 - 1. He's diagnosed that people just need to be told that Jesus loves them just as they are
 - 2. And so the treatment must be to scrap anything in the Bible that might make them feel otherwise
 - a. And yet, doesn't Paul tell Timothy that "ALL Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness?"
 - b. Doesn't Jesus point to ALL of the Old Testament on the road to Emmaus, reminding his disciples that it is ALL about him?
 - i. Cherry-picking the Scriptures is NOT the answer
 - ii. The wrong diagnosis... leads to the wrong treatment
3. One example that hits closer to home is a recent piece of legislation that was proposed by our Oklahoma State Superintendent, that the Bible should be taught in all public schools, from grades 5 through 12
 - a. On the surface, this sounds like a great thing, right?
 - i. Get the Word of God back in the public schools, and let the Word do its work!
 - 1. But here's the problem... many of the teachers in our public school system are NOT Christians
 - a. Not only do they not have any training to properly teach the Scriptures, but even more importantly, they

do not have the Holy Spirit to give them
UNDERSTANDING of the Word

2. So if this legislation were to pass, we would now have thousands of unregenerate, Spirit-less teachers instructing our children on the Spirit-inspired Word of God
 - a. At best, this proposal will be wholly ineffective
 - b. But at worst, the way the Scriptures are taught by these unbelievers could damage the next generation for years to come
- ii. And at the root of this is the fact that it is based off of the wrong diagnosis
 1. The diagnosis is that we simply need to get the Bible back in front of people, and our school system will improve
 2. And so the treatment must be to mandate that the Bible be taught in every public school, or there will be consequences
 - a. Yet doesn't Paul say that "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."
 - b. Doesn't Jesus say that understanding ONLY comes to those to whom it has been granted by his Father?
 - i. The wrong diagnosis... leads to the wrong treatment
4. One of the more popular misdiagnoses of our day is that we just need to BE Jesus to the people
 - a. "Preach the Gospel at all times," they say, "And if necessary, use words."
 - i. My friends, it is GOOD for the Church to be involved in our local communities
 1. It is GOOD for us to provide mercy ministries like food banks and shelters
 2. It is GOOD for us to seek to meet the physical needs of those around us, if we have the means to do so
 - a. But we must not lose sight of the fact that, for all those who do not know Christ, their most pressing need is the healing of their souls
 3. We must point them to the Great Physician
 - a. AND we must call every sinner to repentance
 - i. A watered-down Gospel is powerless to save
 - ii. A Bible that has had all the "difficult" and "offensive" parts of it removed, is powerless to save
 - iii. A Bible taught by those who do not know the One who wrote it, is powerless to save
 - iv. A social gospel that is only defined by good works, with no call to repentance, is powerless to save
- iii. Jesus reclined at the table often with tax collectors and prostitutes
 1. So much so that Matthew tells us that many accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard

2. But he didn't just hang out with them and wish them well, did he?
 - a. For that would be the mark of a very poor physician
 - i. Jesus knew that, for each of them, their soul was terminally sick... their heart was desperately wicked
 1. This was the one diagnosis that mattered
 - a. So he gave them the only fitting treatment – he called sinners to repentance
- iv. My friends, I wonder, have you come to this understanding of your great need?
 1. I fear that there are many in the church today that have treated Jesus like just another vaccine
 - a. I got my shot of just a little bit of Jesus, so now I'm good, right?
 - i. The problem is, we don't need "just a little bit of Jesus" in our lives
 1. Those who get just a little bit of Jesus become just like the Pharisees and the Scribes who were in Matthew's house on that day
 - a. They got just enough so that now, in their own eyes, they are righteous
 - i. They're good, right?
 - ii. The problem is EVERYONE ELSE... if EVERYONE ELSE would just get their act together, then everything would be fine
 2. Those who treat Jesus like a one-time flu shot end up becoming infected with self-righteousness
 - a. And they become inoculated against Jesus himself
 2. Brothers and sisters, we don't need just a little shot of Jesus
 - a. We need him to permeate EVERY aspect of who we are, all the way down to our very souls
 - i. THAT is the cure that we are ALL so desperately in need of
 - b. Levi had no idea that his life was going to change for all eternity on that day
 - i. But Christ, by the grace of his Father, stopped in front of Levi's tax booth and said to him, "Follow me."
 1. Levi, who was once an enemy of God, soon became known as Matthew, "the gift of God"
 - a. For the greatest gift that God could give to any of us is the gift of a new heart
 - i. A heart that is not hardened
 - ii. A heart that is not sick
 - iii. But rather, a heart that is whole and healed and restored
 1. A heart FULL of the Spirit of God!