

Luke 5:27-32

Here we have the account of the calling of one more of Jesus' disciples, Levi, more commonly known as Matthew. Back in the first part of this chapter, we saw the calling of Simon Peter, James and John, (very likely Andrew, Peter's brother). The calling of the twelve disciples is very interesting to me, especially when you consider the likes of some of the people he chose. None of them was what we would consider qualified. Take Levi here for example, we are told that he was a publican, (tax-collector) which was one of the most despised, crooked, conniving individuals of the day. Yet, Jesus chose this man to be one of his 12 disciples. Just as he chose Simon earlier in this chapter, a man which acknowledges his sinfulness to Jesus, "*if you knew what kind of man I was, you wouldn't be in this boat...*" But Jesus knew what kind of man he was...yet he chose him anyway. I dare say, that most of us, placed in that same position, would have never even considered these men. But nonetheless, that's whom ***he chose***...which is a very interesting topic. These men did not simply decide to follow Jesus, but rather Jesus chose them. In John 15, speaking to the twelve, Jesus said, "*You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...*" He even hand selected Judas Iscariot, knowing full well that he would betray him and sell him out!

Here we have the call of Jesus on the life of this man by the name of Levi... Unlike the calling of Simon and his partners, James and John, Levi's call contained involved no show of power by Jesus. According to both Luke and Matthew's account, Matthew was just sitting at his desk, at the receipt of custom, and Jesus walked by and simply asked him to follow him. Now it's obvious that there's more to the story than that, but that is all we are told. The most likely one being, that Levi had been at the meetings Jesus had been holding, and had been listening to him and saw the miracles he was doing. It's obvious that the Spirit of God had been at work in this man's heart, and he was ripe for the picking.

²⁷*And after these things he went forth, and saw **a publican**, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom:*

The simple fact that Levi was a publican, tells us that Levi was one of the most despised men in Capernaum. The term publican refers to a tax collector. But this is not your average IRS agent; these tax collectors of this day were considered low lives. The very fact that any man accepted the job of publican made him an outcast, because he was seen as a traitor. All publicans were employed by Rome, which was considered an enemy. By nature of his position, his first loyalty had to be to Rome. His position required him to collect taxes from his own people on their land, possessions, businesses, etc, used to support the Roman government's agenda. Rome required a certain percentage of taxes on goods, and allowed anything collected above and beyond that amount to be considered the publicans pay. And given the fact that he had the power of the Roman government behind him to back him, he basically had a license for extortion. He basically could set any price he wanted to, and then threaten you with legal action if you didn't pay.

That helps us to understand the animosity expressed here by the Pharisees and Scribes...

³⁰*But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*

When you consider it from a human standpoint, it's easy to understand why they felt the way they did towards them. If we'd be honest this evening, we all can probably say that we have played the part of the Pharisee on many occasions. Levi may be our next-door neighbor, whom we know for a fact to be a lying, conniving, cheating scoundrel, one who we don't want anything to with... You ever been there? I mean, we go to church, we try and do what's right...but this guy's a thief, and I don't want anything do with THAT kind of people...

Historic Jewish writings reveal that ***a Jewish publican*** was barred from the synagogue, and was forbidden to have any religious or social contact with his fellow Jews. He was considered to be in the class of swine,

considered a traitor an a liar, classified with robbers and murders, and was forbidden to give testimony in any Jewish court.

In Luke 18, we read of an encounter between a “*good church going man*” and one of these publicans...

(Luke 18) ⁹And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. (I'm convinced that this story is an actual event that happened, and that the Pharisee who thought these things within himself, was present when Jesus was telling the story)

¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹²I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

What a “*good man*” he is... He’s certainly not like all these others low life’s around him... He’s not like these thieves out here, stealing from everyone, he’s not these other men, whom you can’t trust as far as you can throw them. He’s not like some of these other husbands he knows that go around cheating on their wives. And he’s certainly not like this traitor, who cheats people out their hard earned money... Notice, not only does he affirm that he’s a good man, but he’s a godly man, he fast twice a week like your suppose to, he gives his tithes...

What he fails to mention is that he has a dark, dark heart, a heart is full of poison... (*Viper*) Well on second thought, maybe he didn’t fail to mention it, I mean, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. It’s clearly apparent by his words that he is full of the spirit of self-righteousness... The words of the heart of this man reveals that he doesn’t have a clue to the truth of his own spiritual condition. Now he’s quiet privy to that of his brothers...but he can’t see his... Listen that is a signature trademark of a modern day Pharisee, the ability to so clearly see the sins of others, while completely blind to their own.

¹³And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his eyes* unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

(Luke 5:30) ³⁰But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Do you hear the **tone** of disdain and disgust? That is the “*voice of superiority*” speaking... That manifests a heart that is filled with the spirit...the spirit of Self-righteousness...

Why do you eat with such **scum**?

These *self-righteous* men did not think they needed God’s forgiveness and were certain that these publicans and sinners *did not deserve it!*

Their “*ministry*” was not to help sinners, but to judge sinners...

Theirs was not to *restore men*...but to *condemn men*...

(Vs 31) Jesus answers as to why he eats with publicans and sinners, in parabolic form, by saying that “*they that are whole don’t need a physician, but those that are sick.*”

A very simple analogy... Those who are healthy, don’t have any need of a doctor. A doctor is for those that are sick. A doctor is absolutely of no use to those who are healthy. How many of you schedule appointments with your doctor, just because... Truth is, doctors never enter our mind until we are sick. And there’s nothing really wrong with that, that’s just the way it is.

Here Jesus applies that truth to explain “*why he eats with publicans and sinners*”. What kind of doctor would spend all of his time with **healthy** people, and refuse to associate with those who are **sick**? “*Are you doctors*” he implied to the Pharisees, “*who diagnose the problem, but have no desire to cure?*” “*Will you tell a person what his disease is and then refuse to give him medicine for it?*” What an indictment of their self-righteousness and hardheartedness. They were “*specialist*” at diagnosing the problems with people, but absolutely pathetic when it came to helping them.

This serves as a good reminder... Most of us are very good at identifying the problem with others, but are we as quick to offer them the help they need.

Something Luke fails to mention here, that is recorded in Matthew’s account, is what Jesus said in-between these two statements...

They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. ¹³**But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

That phrase “**go and learn**” was a common expression of rebuke among rabbi’s to someone who did not know what they should know. It is a rebuke for the fact that they claim to be godly men, when in fact, they manifest they don’t have a clue who God is, they have no idea what He is like! “*I will have mercy and not sacrifice*” is a quotation from **Hosea 6:6**...

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Sacrifice and burnt offerings speak of worship... They both speak to the worship offered to God by the hands of the people. A large part of the Jewish worship consisted of sacrificial offerings, whether it be grain, oil, birds, lambs, whatever... The point here in Hosea is, God is not interested or impressed by the offerings of dead animals, the empty offerings of our hands. Those sacrificial offerings signified the supreme sacrifice, of His son. They were established to teach the mercy and compassion God has towards sinners. Each time they offered them, they were portraying the sacrificial offering up of the body of Christ. God’s not interested in the “*empty offerings of men’s hands...*” God’s desire is that we may know Him, and come to realize the deep abiding love he has for us, and then truly worship him by expressing that love towards the lost, those who don’t know him. God is not impressed by the fact that we “*go to church,*” do “*Churchy things,*” and such. We can come in here every time the doors are open, we can be involved in every organization within the church, but if we’re not personally involved in reaching out to those out here dying in sin, all that we do, it is empty and vain.

The fact that the quotation was from Hosea made it all the more pointed. The story of Gomer’s unfaithfulness to her husband Hosea was a living illustration of Israel’s own unfaithfulness to God; and Hosea’s continuing love and forgiveness of Gomer was a picture of the continuing love and forgiveness God offered Israel.

Beloved, to know and worship God is to know the mercy and compassion of God towards sinners, expressed by “OUR” loving sinners! If we are not careful, we’ll find ourselves no differently than these Pharisee’s, despising the very one’s that Jesus came to give his life for. These men that we are reading of here in this story in Luke, considered themselves to be “*godly men,*” given they went to the temple, gave offerings to God, kept all the commandments of God... but the truth was, they were anything but godly.

God *loves sinners*... They bore more of a resemblance to their father, the devil. For the devil hates and despises sinners. The very spirit these men were filled with...

They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. ³²***I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***