

JESUS CAME TO CALL SINNERS TO REPENTANCE

Luke 5:27-39

Key Verse: 5:32

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

In today's passage we can see a conflict between the gospel and Judaism. As Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God by teaching God's word, healing the sick, driving out demons, and raising disciples, his following grew rapidly. His ministry was characterized by the forgiveness of sins, restoration of the whole person, new life, joy and peace. Many sinners repented and received the forgiveness of sins. They began a new life with a new hope and vision. When the religious leaders saw this movement, they felt threatened and became critical. In response, Jesus clearly stated why he came. Jesus came precisely to call sinners to repentance. Then through two parables, Jesus explained the nature of gospel ministry, and why it was incompatible with Judaism.

Down through the generations many gospel movements have begun with spirit and vitality. But as time passes the spirit vanishes, they lose their original purpose, and only the organization remains. So the Christian church needs to be renewed again and again. Otherwise, it easily becomes like an old wineskin. For example, in the 16th century, when the Roman Catholic Church was steeped in human tradition and corrupted, God gave his words to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others and they led a Reformation with the slogans: “Sola Scriptura,” (Scripture alone), “Sola Fide,” (faith alone), “Sola Gratia,” (grace alone), “Solus Christus,” (Christ alone), and “Soli Deo Gloria,” (glory to God alone). Through this a reformed Protestant church emerged. But as time passed it also became stagnant and needed renewal. Many spiritual revivals have arisen. But the same phenomenon happens again and again. We are not an exception. Jesus said, **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”** Let's listen to Jesus' words, examine ourselves, repent and become new wineskins.

First, Jesus called Levi as his disciple (27-32). After proclaiming forgiveness of sins and healing a paralyzed man, Jesus went out (27a). Though Jesus is the Son of God, he did not sit back and wait for people to come to him. Rather, he took the initiative and went out to seek the lost ones with great compassion. He saw Levi sitting at his tax booth. Usually, when people saw Levi, they categorized him as a public sinner. They treated him with contempt as a national traitor and segregated and isolated him. They had no hope for such people and condemned them based on their standard. But Jesus was different. Jesus had compassion upon Levi. Jesus saw that he was dying due to his sins. Jesus saw that he was like a bruised reed and a

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smoldering wick (Mt 12:20). A bruised reed is easily broken by just a little pressure. A smoldering wick will go out with just a slight breath of air. Jesus healed the bruised reed and revived the smoldering wick. Jesus understood Levi's suffering and bore his weaknesses. Jesus knew that healing such a person would take a long time. So Jesus said to him, **"Follow me."**

Jesus saw Levi, not only with the eyes of compassion, but also with the eyes of hope. Jesus saw Levi as a talented man with great potential. The only problem was that he was misdirected. He had used all of his abilities for his own benefit and lived for his own pleasure and glory. But Jesus saw that if he just changed his direction from himself to God, he could be a very influential and fruitful kingdom worker. So Jesus said to him, **"Follow me."** When we see only the present condition and situation of people it is hard to have hope. But when we see people with the eyes of Jesus we can find hope for anyone, beyond the present situation.

When Jesus said, **"Follow me,"** he was inviting Levi to be his disciple, that is, to learn of him and grow to become like him. Jesus was challenging him to set a new life direction. Life direction is very important to anyone. To follow Jesus or not may not seem to make much difference at the beginning stage. But as time passes, the results are clearly evident. If we pursue our own pleasure and seek our own glory, we become more and more self-indulgent, bear bad fruit, and give a destructive influence. On the other hand, when we follow Jesus we can grow to be like him, bear good fruit and give a good influence to others (Ro 2:6-8). The words **"follow me"** imply that if we follow Jesus, he forgives all of our sins and bears all of our weaknesses until we grow to be useful men and women of God. Jesus takes responsibility for the outcome if we just follow him. **"Follow me"** is a great invitation, full of grace, hope and love. Anyone who follows Jesus can become a new creation. When we follow Jesus, our future is guaranteed to be meaningful, fruitful and hopeful. Let's accept Jesus' invitation, **"Follow me."**

How did Levi respond? Verse 28 says, **"...Levi got up, left everything, and followed him."** Since Levi had decided to be a tax collector, he seemed stuck in his tax booth with no way out. But when he heard Jesus' words, **"Follow me,"** he began to see a light of new hope in the darkness. New strength came into his soul. Though he had lived a terribly selfish life, Jesus was giving him a new chance. He was overwhelmed by God's great love for a sinner like him. He could find the true meaning of life and real purpose. So he could get up, leave everything and follow Jesus. He could leave his secure job as a tax collector and the bad habits he had indulged in. In a word, he left his old life in order to live a new life in Jesus. He was like the prodigal son. Levi did not just leave in his mind, but he actually

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got up, left everything and followed Jesus. Here we see that sincere repentance can be seen in one's actions. In the past, Levi had lost everything—his dignity, honor, friends and nation—in order to get money and enjoy some small pleasures. He had also lost his conscience and God's image. He felt that he would never regain these things. But when he followed Jesus, he found all that was lost. Once he was lost, but now he was found in Jesus.

When Levi began to follow Jesus, heavenly joy and peace flooded in his heart, which he had never experienced before. In the past everything looked gray and gloomy, but now everything looked bright and hopeful. He could not keep his joy all to himself; he had to share it with others. So he held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, inviting all of his tax collector friends and many others. He bought large packages of choice ribs and beef steaks, all kinds of seafood, fresh vegetables, fruits, and huge jars of milk and honey. Levi spent a lot of money, but he had no sense of loss because it was for Jesus. For the first time his large house was full of people. They were amazed at the change in Levi's life and wanted to meet Jesus. When they met Jesus, they shared their life stories, confessed their sins with tears and received the grace of forgiveness. Then they laughed and talked freely and enjoyed delicious food. It was a picture of the feast in the heavenly kingdom.

However, there was one group of people who were not so happy: the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (29). One reason they were unhappy may be that they were hungry. But the main reason was that they were legalistic and critical, thinking that Jesus had broken the law by eating with sinners. So they complained to his disciples, **“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”** (30) We need to understand why they were so upset. During the time of Ezra they struggled hard to keep their identity as God's people while living in an idol worshiping culture. So Ezra taught the word of God very diligently and cared for his people with a great shepherd's heart. It led to a spiritual revival and a piety movement. The Pharisees were descendants of this movement. They were respected by the people. But in Jesus' time they had lost the spirit of Ezra while retaining a religious organization and system. They made a box and wanted to put everyone in the box. If someone did not fit into their box, they were treated as sinners without understanding or mercy. In a word, the Pharisees became self-righteous. To them, tax collectors were incorrigible sinners from whom they dissociated.

When Jesus heard their complaining, he did not get upset with them. Rather, he wanted to help them to see people with God's eyes. He said, **“It is not the**

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healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (31). Jesus explained that God sees sinners like a doctor sees sick people. Recently, I had the chance to see a doctor treat a patient and was amazed. The doctor was absolutely on the side of the patient. The doctor listened to him with full attention, understood all that he said, and did everything possible to create an environment for healing him. The doctor did not allow any threatening elements near the patient, protecting the patient from hospital workers who were heartless and negligent. The doctor gained the patient’s full trust. The patient could rest and fully cooperated in the healing process. While being absolutely on the side of the patient, the doctor was absolutely determined to cure the sickness, using any and every available means. The doctor did not see the patient as a sick person, but envisioned the patient as fully restored and healthy. The doctor worked with full dedication to realize that vision, spending time, energy, money and whatever was necessary. This is just a slight glimpse of how Jesus our Savior cares for sinners. Jesus is many things to us, and one of them is our great physician. To Luke, a medical doctor, it was amazing to see Jesus’ compassion, skill and power to heal any kind of sin-sick people. As I thought about Jesus, I found the need to repent. It is so easy for me to be critical instead of seeing and serving with compassion. Lord, help me to share your mind in seeing and serving others.

Then Jesus said in verse 32, **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”** What does this mean? Here “the righteous” do not refer to those who are right in the sight of God, but to the self-righteous. They are not aware of their sins and do not think they need a spiritual doctor. Even though they feel okay, they are still very sick with sin. They are too proud to come to Jesus. Jesus did not come to establish an honor society of self-righteous people. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. Calling to “repentance” does not mean pointing out our sins and rebuke us sharply. It means helping us to change our mindset and lifestyle from self-centered to God-centered. In the process of helping us Jesus accepts us as we are and humbly serves us in many ways. Jesus is always with us. Jesus comforts us, encourages us, and teaches us the word of God. In this way, Jesus heals our sin-sickness until we fully recover.

Being with us, eating with us, listening to us and understanding us are great means of healing. One young man, who was really struggling emotionally and spiritually said, “All I really want is to be heard and understood.” When he felt understood, he became much better. Anyone who serves Christ in caring for the souls of others should learn of Jesus. It is not our job to interject all kinds of ideas based on our common sense and expectations. We should imitate Jesus in embracing and understanding others with his mind. There are so many sick people

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like Matthew. Outwardly they seem to be okay. But inwardly their souls are dying in loneliness, sorrow, despair and fatalism. No one can fully understand and heal such people. Only Jesus can. They desperately need a spiritual doctor, Jesus. Jesus is willing to heal us, restore us, and enable us to live a healthy life. That is why Jesus came. Let's always remember Jesus' purpose in coming.

Second, new wine must be poured into new wineskins (33-39). Jesus wanted to help the religious leaders to have God's mind and heart toward sinners. But they seemed to have ignored his teaching. They continued to attack him by bringing another issue. They said to him, **"John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking"** (33). After Levi invited Jesus, many tax collectors invited Jesus and his disciples. Jesus continually went to their homes for eating fellowship. So the religious leaders criticized Jesus as being a glutton and a drunkard. In the law, fasting was required only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29), and voluntary fasts were encouraged according to the need for prayer. But the religious leaders developed rules that required fasting twice a week (Lk 18:12). Those who did this were regarded as righteous, while those who did not were regarded as self-indulgent sinners. By implication, the religious leaders were condemning Jesus' disciples as self-indulgent sinners. Jesus answered, **"Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"** (34) Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to the friends. While the disciples were with Jesus, they should not mourn or be grumpy by fasting. Rather, they should celebrate by eating and drinking joyfully. But Jesus did not discredit fasting. Rather, he taught that in regards to fasting time is important. The time would come when the bridegroom would be taken from them. This refers to his crucifixion. At that time, they would fast (35). Figuratively speaking, when Jesus is not in our hearts due to our sins and complacency, it is the time to fast and pray that Jesus may come into our hearts and rule over us.

Jesus further taught that his ministry was not compatible with Judaism by telling two parables—one about garments and the other about wine and wineskins. In two different ways, Jesus taught the same principle. Pieces of new garments cannot be patches for old garments. If this is attempted, both the new and the old garments will be ruined (36). And new wine cannot be poured into old wineskins. If it is, both the wine and the skins are ruined (37). So new wine must be poured into new wineskins (38). Through these parables, Jesus teaches the nature of gospel ministry in comparison to Judaism. The gospel is new, vibrant and dynamic. It has explosive power. The gospel gives us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and living hope in the kingdom of God. It can transform any kind of person into a new

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creation. The gospel heals sin-sick people and makes them useful, powerful and fruitful. The gospel empowers people to break free from lifeless, meaningless traditions and enables them to serve the living God in holiness and righteousness. In order to accept the gospel and live it out we should be humble and flexible like new wineskins. The problem of the religious leaders was that they were fixed in their traditions. They refused to change, saying **“The old is better”** (39). They insisted on following their own system and stubborn ideas as their way of righteousness, thinking that they were most pious. They became legalistic, judgmental and condemning in order to defend their system.

How can we become new wineskins? Simply speaking, we need to examine ourselves, sincerely repent, and accept Jesus newly as our Lord and Savior. After Jesus’ resurrection, Peter delivered the gospel message to the people of Israel and challenged them: **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...”** (Ac 3:19). If we repent, God will surely forgive our sins and refresh our souls. Then the judgmental, critical and complaining spirit will vanish and we will become humble, flexible and gracious. We can embrace any kinds of sinners, serve them with a delicious meal, share the living words of God with them, and pray with them. Then our lives will be vibrant, dynamic and fruitful. Let’s come to Jesus.