

Luke 5C

- Jesus is no longer an unknown quantity, and he has begun to make powerful enemies
 - The study of Jesus' ministry and the opposition provided by the religious leaders of the day is a focal point for Luke over the next several chapters
 - And it will be for us as well
 - This contrast offers us among other things the opportunity to understand better the difference between the bitterness of works verses joy of grace
 - Between restitution verses forgiveness
 - Between religion verses relationship
- Even as Jesus contends with the religious leaders and reveals them as the hypocrites they were,
 - He is also ministering to the lost and revealing the love of God to them

[Luke 5:27](#) ¶ After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me."

[Luke 5:28](#) And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him.

- In this day, the Roman Empire had made Judea a province subject to Roman rule
 - The key was money – the ability to tax
 - Just like the British in the American colonies
 - And the Roman's hired natives to perform the business of tax collecting
 - Taxes were often unspecified
 - Only the amount the collector must turn in would be set
 - Collectors could often collect anything they wanted and for anything they wanted

- The booth here is likely a roadside stand
- Assess taxes on passing carts of goods
- Probably the main road between Hazor & Damascus
- Levy taxes on the goods, the animal, the cart itself, the wheels of the cart, etc.
- They had the backing of the Roman army to support their demands of the people
- Obviously tax collectors would not be well-liked
 - They were Jews who had sold out in the eyes of fellow Jews
 - In fact, they often had no friends or acquaintances other than other tax collectors
- But they were also often wealthy since they had ample opportunity to extort money while collecting the taxes
- Here we find Levi – or as he will be known after this point: Matthew
 - He’s in his tax booth, and Jesus walks by
 - The scripture records only a brief exchange with Levi
 - Jesus stops at the booth and invites Levi to follow him
 - In the next verse we’re told, he got up and left everything behind
 - Matthew is leaving behind his profession, he is walking away from his role as tax collector
 - And he is assuming a new role as Jesus’ disciple, which means pupil, student
- Really, this isn’t all that surprising if you consider Jesus’ rising fame
 - The tax collector must have been flabbergasted that Jesus even stopped at his booth
 - Jesus was a rock star, the famous and mysterious prophet
 - And as a teacher, a rabbi, it was natural and expected that he would collect to himself disciples that He will instruct

- Matthew must have been stunned that Jesus selected him of all people
- Perhaps that made his decision to follow easier in some way
- But I also believe that there is another reason Matthew left everything so easily – perhaps a reason we can all identify with a little
 - We’ve already said, Matthew was a hated man, a turncoat, a traitor
 - And ever since he had taken this role he had faced the contempt of everyone he knew
 - It’s like he responded by increasing his tax demands, as a kind of retribution for their hatred
- And we can easily imagine what this spiral of hatred would have done to Matthew’s reputation and social life
 - And even though he had become rich, he was empty
 - None of the money has satisfied, none of the power
 - He wasn’t happy, and he wasn’t fulfilled
 - And he knew that simply pursuing more of the things he had already pursued wasn’t bringing him any closer to what he wished for
 - And I believe he may have even hated himself for who he had become
 - A Jewish traitor
 - A pariah among his own people
- He knew he was a disgrace, and yet he was trapped
 - He’s got no future other than the one he’s set for himself
 - Have you ever felt that way?
 - You regret some past decision(s) that have created your present circumstances,

- And yet there seems no going back, no escape
- Then along comes a solution, so freeing, yet so radical it takes your breath away
 - Just walk away from it all
 - But not in defeat, not succumbing to your own sin and mistakes
 - But walk away to start again, a new way that leaves behind the old self
 - That must have been Matthew's perspective
 - The hope and rescue he never imagined could be possible
 - And Jesus made a way with one simple phrase...come follow me
 - And Jesus embraced Matthew, accepted him, and then directed him toward a new life
 - It was truly a new beginning
- And so do we
 - When Christ calls us out of the sad purposeless life we're leading and gives us a new calling, he says the same thing to us
 - You can forget who you were, your mistakes and the life they created
 - You are forgiven for what you've done – and what you will do
 - And so free of worry and condemnation, we direct our full attention to becoming a pupil of our master
 - And we begin to learn a new life
- Wouldn't be a shame to hear Jesus call and experience that new start, but then choose to leave a life that looks exactly the same
 - It's as if we are Matthew and we hear Jesus offer and we agree to become his students
 - But we decide to stay in the toll booth and try to learn what we can by correspondence course

- For Matthew the change meant leaving behind a profession of shame, of dishonesty and oppression
 - So that he become a man who collected new believers rather than money
 - A man who recorded one of the Gospels
- Who can imagine what God is prepared to do with each of us when we agree to leave behind our own life and seek to be His pupil
 - I can't say what God is prepared to do with each of you,
 - But one thing is for sure, we're not supposed to stay in that booth
- Look at Matthew's response to Jesus' invitation

[Luke 5:29](#) ¶ And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them.

[Luke 5:30](#) The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?"

[Luke 5:31](#) And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.

[Luke 5:32](#) "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

- So what does someone do after he quits his job? He holds a party for all his friends
 - That's what Matthew does
 - Matthew holds a party in honor of Jesus,
 - From the short description of the event, we see confirmation that Matthew is as wealthy as we expected
 - We also notice that most of the crowd were other tax collectors, though there were others who come for the festivities
 - In fact, it seems to be an open invitation for anyone to come
 - The word for reception can also mean feast or a welcoming celebration
 - This is something that everyone could attend to welcome Jesus

- And even the Pharisees showed up
- Together with the scribes they comment about Jesus' willingness to be seen with these people
 - The Pharisees are grumbling, we're told
 - The word in Greek literally means buzzing as bees
 - And they called the crowd tax collectors and sinners
 - Truly, they saw these groups as one and the same of course
 - And sinner here means specifically one who would not live under the Mosaic law
 - All men sin, but these were people who refused to atone for sin by living under the law, and even worse, they flaunted their unreligious lifestyle
- So the Pharisees approach not Jesus – but instead the disciples (verse 30)
 - Interesting isn't it that the Pharisees aren't willing to confront Jesus but instead are trying to influence his students concerning righteousness
 - Listening to them, what would you suppose they would want to see happen here?
 - Obviously, Jesus shouldn't go anywhere near this crowd
 - Instead, Jesus should condemn the unrighteous living of the tax collectors and their friends
 - Then Jesus should demand that the crowd go back to the temple and perform the ritual sacrifices required
 - They should pay retribution, return their money, pledge to stop collecting taxes, etc.
 - Then if they do all these things, the Pharisees might permit the crowd an audience with Jesus in a synagogue
 - But they would have to remain at the back of the congregation reflecting their lowly status

- Why all this?
 - Because the Pharisees are far more interested in protecting a system of rules and prohibitions than in rehabilitate sinners
 - In fact, their particular adherences to the law was designed to limit who could be seen as righteous rather than open the doors wide
 - To be sure, God's law is not the problem here. It is perfect and holy
 - The problem was how the Pharisees in their unbelief misused it
 - These were evil, unbelieving hypocritical men who served themselves not God
 - And they fought with Jesus to protect a system rather than to seek truth
 - This is the pattern for all men who present themselves as holy but lack true faith
 - They always come with rules and regulations, prohibitions and restrictions
 - And they use the rules to control men and to strengthen their own position
 - And since the Pharisees hadn't yet figured out a way to bring down this prophet who was teaching this new, threatening viewpoint against their leadership
 - They do the next best thing: they seek to nullify His impact by peeling off His students, His disciples
 - And this spirit continues even today, among those who prosecute the fight by warring for your mind, for your belief in what is required by God
 - What is pleasing to God
- In this exchange, the Pharisees urge Jesus' disciples to refrain from associated with sinners
 - Their purpose is as easy to understand as it is repugnant
 - The Pharisees want the disciples to enforce a kind of public sentence of disgrace against these men

- They were sinners and they needed to feel the scorn and displeasure of the righteous within society
 - How dare the disciples show their approval of these men by honoring them with their presence
- If these men wanted to be accepted within society, then they first needed to come to grips with their sin
 - In effect, the Pharisees wanted these men to take steps toward becoming righteous before they could be worthy of receiving the attention of good men like the Pharisees or disciples
- As usual, the unrighteous completely misunderstand what righteousness is
- Jesus gives the correct perspective
 - He says the Messiah's very mission is to seek after the unrighteous and call them to repent
 - Like a physician, Jesus is sent for those who are sick than those who are healthy
 - Oh how it would have shocked the Pharisees to know that they were just as sick as these tax collectors
 - They needed a physician every bit as much
 - This is the biggest impediment to any unbeliever coming to faith and receiving grace
 - They are convinced they are healthy
 - They aren't sick, and therefore they don't need a physician
 - They are just like these Pharisees
 - Their prideful self-righteousness was their own downfall
 - Secondly, Jesus points out the obvious
 - A physician has to make house calls to the sick people if you hope to have any chance to heal them
 - Jesus is celebrating with them, not lecturing them

- In other words, He's living with them without condoning their sin nor participating in it
 - But still He's with them
 - Giving them the opportunity to see His wisdom and the truth of his words
- We can't all be like Jesus in our ability to heal, but we have the master's medicine - the truth of the gospel shared with those who welcome us
- Take note of the contrast Luke is building here
 - These men of the law are upset at anything that breaks convention
 - They seek retribution, penance and revenge rather than healing
 - In fact, in Matthew's own account of this scene, he records Jesus quoting from Hosea saying:

[Matt. 9:13](#) "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- The law revealed sin, but it offered no solution for it other than condemnation – which is no solution at all
 - The more we understand that the more we look to God to provide a solution – as Paul calls it, a schoolmaster to drive us to Christ
 - And the Pharisees are intent on using the law in a false way –
 - On the one hand, to grant themselves a kind of self-made righteousness according to their ability to keep the law
 - And on the other hand, as a noose to tie around the necks of the people to forever keep them under a sentence of condemnation, as a form of leverage over the people
- Then Jesus walks onto the scene and begins acting as if the law isn't going to be good enough to make these people righteous
 - And that's exactly what he's saying to them and to us
 - Look at the next series of verses

[Luke 5:33](#) ¶ And they said to Him, “The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.”

[Luke 5:34](#) And Jesus said to them, “You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?”

[Luke 5:35](#) “But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.”

[Luke 5:36](#) And He was also telling them a parable: “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.

[Luke 5:37](#) “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.

[Luke 5:38](#) “But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

[Luke 5:39](#) “And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good *enough*.’”

- In response to Jesus declaring that he was right to mix with these people, the Pharisees try to point to Jesus’ own failings with respect to righteousness and propriety
 - They make mention of how his disciples did not fast regularly like other disciples of teachers
 - And interestingly, they use John the Baptist as the example
 - They could have used virtually any teacher of the day or even themselves as examples, because fasting was a common practice for Jewish students
 - In the life of a Jew, everyday brought trials and difficulties
 - The burdens of their life were difficult for us to appreciate today
 - The law and the societal customs had been piled upon one another to make living in the Jewish culture a very difficult and weary existence
 - In the case of fasting, fasting from sun up to sundown occurred frequently (usually twice each week) for every good religious Jew
 - This was on top of regular prayer intervals, temple sacrifices, synagogue worship, and regular work

- In fact, one of the reasons a Jewish wedding is such a celebration is that these regular weekly practices were put aside for the week of celebration surrounding the marriage
 - This was one of the few times a young Jew could legally relax with no fasting, rituals, restrictions
 - And not only the bride and bridegroom but their guests were also free from these restrictions during the week-long celebration
- So Jesus uses that analogy to make his point
 - Jesus says you can't make the guests fast during the time they celebrate with their bridegroom
 - We know from scripture that Jesus is called our bridegroom and the Church is His bride collectively
 - And while He is with His disciples, there is only joy and celebration
 - Just as you would expect between a groom and bride
 - But fasting is a restriction upon joy
 - And as such, it is a sign of our waiting for a future time of rejoicing to come
 - So Jesus says that fasting will become part of the experience of Christ's followers once He is gone
 - I can't touch on these verse without making a momentary comment on fasting
 - It seems to me that fasting as a spiritual discipline is virtually lost in the church today
 - Fasting is seen throughout the gospels and the book of Acts, usually accompanying prayer
 - Here we see Jesus himself mentioning it's necessity importance
 - Why would denying ourselves food have spiritual significance?

- The simplest answer is it's not the food that matters, but the denying of self and of joy itself that reflects both a willingness to submit to God and to wait for Him
 - It's a discipline of submission because it's the clearest way to connect our will to our flesh – to practice the submitting of the flesh to the will rather than the other way around
 - Our hunger is the strongest, ever-present reminder of the strength of our flesh
 - Of it's independent nature and desire
 - Of how it can control us even though it doesn't involve rational thought
 - Of how we can be forced to do things by it we don't desire
 - And if you practice the discipline of fasting regularly, denying yourself in a meaningful way in the area of hunger and food, then your flesh's control over you will slowly give way to your will
 - And the Holy Spirit in you will take ownership of your will, and with your flesh in submission, do great things
 - Secondly, the fasting process reduces joy and increases suffering
 - And we gain a reminder that in this world we are to suffer waiting for his return,
 - And that our suffering can only be fully removed by our joining with Him again
 - And then real joy will return
 - Just as for the guests of the bridegroom
- But as with everything, fasting isn't about us doing anything in our strength
 - Yes, we are trying to deny our flesh as an act of our will, but the strength of do that comes from God
 - Which is why prayer is intimately connected with fasting
 - As you fast, make time to pray

- And every time hunger pangs tempt you to break your fast, turn that temptation into a moment of prayer, and watch the discipline grow as God strengthens you
- Then the next time you face a situation where you can't resist temptation, you can draw upon your discipline in fasting to know how reliance on God can address every temptation

- The Pharisees chastise Jesus for not requiring his disciples to fast more because for the Pharisees, the sacrifice of fasting was the means to holiness
 - They wanted to see suffering and sacrifice, and that by those things, men were made holy
 - But Christ says no, they are merely signs of waiting for God and submission to Him in the meantime
 - The real holiness, the true religion, is something altogether different

- Next week we will address the second part of these verses to complete the picture Jesus is drawing
 - And as we move toward the next ten chapters of Luke,
 - beginning in 6 with more arguments with the Pharisees
 - culminating with the three parables in Luke 15 and the prodigal son,
 - Luke builds the complete picture of the faith Jesus brings and how it brings life where the religion of that day brought only death and hardship

- How are we doing on this test, I wonder?
 - Do we represent our faith as joy or penance?
 - As freedom from restrictions that have no connection to righteousness or a lifestyle of burden and restrictions?

- Obviously, a life of faith brings with it the desire to live in a way that pleases God,
- But do we see ourselves as rule enforcers making sure others always stay within the lines?
- Or do we see ourselves as rule breakers in need of God's grace everyday?
 - We know there is a place for exhortation and even rebuke in the face of unrepentant sin within the Body of Christ
 - But for every opportunity like that, we have 100 where we can show grace and be long suffering and patience and forgiving and loving with one another
- And what does the unbelieving world see in each of us?
 - Are we like the Pharisees at times? More interested in enforcing the rules than being the physician
 - More interested in making people pay their due sacrifice than in showing compassion
 - Once we understand that all of us have as much sin to answer for as the other
 - and that the solution to a sinful life is not rules set upon us but a law written on our hearts and the Spirit within us and the Word of God before us
 - Then we can become as physicians brings the message of the gospel through the Word of God to those who are sick, and then let the Great healer do the rest – as He has done and is doing for us even now.