

I begin today with a question... but I don't want to see a show of hands... because I don't want anyone to embarrass themselves. (*"Uh-oh! Pastor has another one of those tough and convicting messages..."*) ... Perhaps(!) ... but most important is... that – *what I am about to preach...* comes **from** and is **true to God's Word**. And it is my belief that God has brought us to His Word together... for a heart evaluation.

Now... this is a self-evaluation... so you can keep the answer to yourself. Respond to the question silently. But please be as **honest** as you can.

How often do you think about God's overall mission for your life? What do you think God wants MOST – to do with your life? (I am not asking what ministries you participate in... what service you provide... But what is behind all that (ultimately)? What are you trying to accomplish...? ... Overall... at home... at work... to friends and family... as well as at church – what do you think God wants MOST from you? Just exactly... **what is your mission?** (And how often do you think about it?) ... [P A U S E] ...

Now here is the reason that I am asking this question. ... We are in a section of Luke (in our study through his Gospel)... in which Jesus faces a lot of criticism... through various situations. In today's passage... Jesus will very clearly articulate His mission... and He will use it to stay on track... without being blown off course... because of the pressures of criticism.

Do you ever face criticism? Has it ever caused you to abandon the course that you knew you were supposed to be on? Knowing (and focusing – often) on our mission is critical for you and I as believers. (Let's face it) we **do** have our critics... don't we...?

Now... here is an assumption that I will be making... as we study our passage today. If you are a Christian... then God is making you more and more like His Son (Jesus.) ... From the moment we have been saved... God begins to transform us into the image of His Son. (The Bible calls this “sanctification.”) ... So... since we are becoming more like Christ –our mission will be more and more similar and matching His. ... If we are being made like Him – shouldn’t we (increasingly) find that **His** desires and **His** passions are our own?

I am not saying that our **methods** will be exactly alike. Jesus performed miracles... and He died on a cross. His **ways** of accomplishing His mission (when He walked this earth) will be different than **our** approaches – but the **mission** should be the same... as you and I continue His mission (here) on earth – as His hands and feet. (This is a crucial point for understanding our take-away from this passage. ... You and I continue the Lord’s mission on earth – as His hands and feet.) ... [P A U S E] ...

Our passage today continues in a section that we began last week. Jesus faced criticism for healing the wrong person (an undeserving leper)... and He did it the wrong way. (He physically *touch*ed the leper... risking becoming unclean *Himself*.) Then Jesus (seemingly) picked a fight with an investigation committee of scribes and pharisees who came from all around to observe Him. Jesus declared Himself to be God by telling a paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven (just before Jesus healed him.)

Last week... Jesus was dealing with the *physically* handicapped. Today... Jesus deals with a *social* outcast. Jesus’ outreach to outcasts continues. That is the reason for the title of this message – “Outreach to Outcasts.”

(And this may give you a clue about the important mission that we all should constantly have.)

Luke 5:27-32

Jesus' example teaches us... (as a local body of the church)... that we need to seek and associate with the outcast... as a part of our mission. And we should know this. We will always have some who will frown on such personal relationships... and associations. ... [P A U S E] ...

You know that there are a lot of believers today who seem to be under the impression that “salvation comes by segregation.” “We need to separate ourselves from the world.” This thinking is just like the pharisees which we just read about. Once we place our faith in Christ... (this thinking argues)... we should have nothing more to do with our old life and non-Christian friends. Only surround yourself with Christian friends and associates. Watch only Christian films... read only Christian literature... shop only where Christians shop.

I get it – that sometimes (if we visit the places we used to frequent as a non-believer... or if we spend time with those we used to carouse with) that temptation might return and cause us to fall. I also understand that the world is getting more evil by the hour. (Association with the world can be dangerous.) ... But we must not over-react. There is a balance... and we must pray that God will lead us in being “in the world – but not of it.” ... What we have modeled for us in today's passage might be calling you and I to seek and associate with the outcast (out in the world.)

Here in Luke 5... Jesus has gone from forgiving sinners to openly associating with them. (LISTEN!) ... Mission requires more than casual

contact. Jesus engages with those in the culture. They sense that He cares for them and does not just preach at them. ... This passage exposes the personal character of His mission.

Jesus associates compassionately with the outcast in need - despite the impression this gives to outsiders. ... Such association is necessary because Jesus' mission is to call the outcast to be healed. ... He offers an accepting hand... while calling on them to turn to God.

Association with outcasts is a part of outreach. Jesus sees in the outcast an opportunity for God to show His grace. ... He extends to Levi the chance for fellowship with God. ... He communicates that (like any sinner) Levi can have a walk with God. ... In **contrast**... the Pharisees want nothing to do with these sinners.

But engagement... (willingness to associate with sinners)... and offering them hope... is the role of those who follow Jesus. ... They must be accepted **first** as “people”... then we can challenge and invite them to walk with God. ... [P A U S E] ...

Luke 5:27-28

Tax collectors were despised as traitors and extortioners.

The Jewish people rightly considered them traitors because they worked for the Roman government... and had the force of Roman soldiers behind them to make people pay taxes. They were very visible Jewish traitors... helping “oppressive” Rome.

The Jewish people rightly considered them extortioners because they could keep whatever they over-collected. The Romans collected their taxes

through a system called “tax-farming.” A Jew who wanted the job would bid for it... against others... for the tax-collecting-job-contract. The Romans awarded the contract to the highest bidder. The man collected taxes... paid the Romans what he promised... and kept the remainder. ... Therefore... there was great motivation for tax collectors to over-charge and cheat any way they wanted -with the force of Roman soldiers. It was a sure way to get rich.

Jewish citizens paid separate taxes for using roads... and for docking their boats on shorelines... and (also) there were import and export duties... There was even a cart tax... in which each wheel of a cart was taxed!

The system was a breeding ground for exploiting fellow Jews. A tax collector could stop anyone on the road... make him unpack his bundles... and charge just about anything his devious heart desired. ... If the traveler could not pay... the tax collector would offer to loan him money at an exorbitant rate. ... This is why they were seen as the scum of Jewish society.

Jewish men who became tax collectors were regarded as outcasts from society. So the religious leaders had them disqualified them as judges or (even) a witness in a court session. They were excommunicated from the synagogue... and in the eyes of the community... the tax collector’s disgrace was extended to his family. The tax-collector’s mother and father were hated and treated as scum for not raising their child better.

Understanding how much Levi was detested... we can appreciate the drama in the opening description of his encounter with Jesus. ... As Jesus goes along... He spots Levi. ... The word that Luke used is theaomai...

which means “*to look with attention.*” Our word *theater* comes from the same word. ... It carries the idea of gazing with a purpose. ... So Jesus consciously singled this man out. ... It is no accident that Jesus selected “Despicable Levi”. ... Jesus shows us the type of person to whom He wishes to minister... and to whom He wishes to show God’s way. ...

NOTICE: ***Jesus takes the initiative with the rejected.***

Jesus and Levi (very likely) had seen each other before (around Capernaum.) It is not hard to imagine that Levi had stood at the fringes of various crowds listening to Jesus. ... Perhaps they had even talked privately. But now Jesus stopped and took a good look at Levi (with “careful and intense staring.) ... Such a contemplative look from Jesus probably made Levi nervously wonder, “*What does Jesus want from me?*” The answer came like a bolt of lightning: “ ‘*Follow me!*,’ Jesus said to him.

Jesus spoke *just* two words: “*Follow me!*” And Matthew’s life would never be the same again. His response was immediate.

What Luke stresses.... is that he made a *decisive break* with his old life and followed Jesus. Luke put it in the Greek that he “*was following him*” (as a continuous pattern of life.) In doing this Levi made a substantial sacrifice because he was wealthy. There were some quiet heroics here because,...unlike the fishermen who had followed Jesus... **he** could **not** go back to his old job if things did not work out. ... Once Levi walked away from his booth... he left behind a lifetime of potentially great wealth. Several of the other disciples could always return to fishing... but Matthew could never turn back.

(And) indeed... Levi **did** follow Christ for the rest of his life... because this Levi... is none other than **Matthew** (the Gospel writer.) Whether he was named Matthew when Jesus first called him... we do not know. Many think that just as Simon was named Peter (“the rock”) by the Lord... so Levi was likewise tagged Matthew (which means “gift of God”). ... If so... this was “**divine poetry**”... because this covetous rip-off artist would become... (as his name suggested)... a gift of God to His people.

This was utterly amazing... because of all the people in Capernaum... Levi was the most publicly **unacceptable** candidate for God’s use. ... Jesus sought out the man no one else wanted... (the one who some wished would come under God’s most **severe judgment**.) ... This shows the glory of Jesus’ ministry.

We also learn from this... that Jesus sees what **WE** can **become**... even while we are lost in our sins. ... Christ saw in the disfigured *life of Levi* (a despised tax collector) a **Matthew** - (more of a writer... evangelist... collector of souls). ... Jesus sees you and I – sinners(!)... with all our moral deformity... and years of bad decision-making... through His ultimate artist’s eye. “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works*” (Ephesians 2:10). No matter how scarred and ugly a sinner’s life may be... Christ can make it into something beautiful for God. ... He has devoted His life to it! It is His mission.

Matthew left all and followed the Lord. This phrase “**left all**” is from the Greek word **kataleipo {kat-al-i’-po}**. This word is a little stronger in the Greek text. It means “to abandon or to forsake.” This is the same word

used to describe a person that leaves everything behind when he dies. It is also used by sailors who sail past a place without stopping.

Matthew was now marching to the drum beat of a different drummer. He no longer listens to the drum beat of Rome or to the crescendo of coins in a bag. ... No... Matthew abandoned his lucrative job... his power... his authority... his prestige among other tax collectors and Roman officials - to march to the drum beat of Jesus Christ. ... Matthew saw the greater value in following Christ than making more money.

Luke 5:28 tells us that “*He left all.*” ... It costs to follow Christ. The cost can be very great... but the cost is always worth it.

Matthew helps us to understand that being a disciple demands our whole life – not just the times when it is convenient. (In terms of commitment)... I can't help but think of an ad that I read about (from the olden days) that was posted for hiring riders for the Pony Express mail delivery system: “DUTY IS HAZARDOUS. ORPHANS PREFERRED.”

Make sure that you count the cost before signing up. ... Many people don't count the cost of following Jesus – and are shocked with the price tag to “*leave everything and follow Him.*” ... Jesus still calls us in that way. “*Be willing to forsake anything that you currently use to survive on... and now depend on Me....*” Many don't - and they stagnate as Christians.

Matthew saw the opportunity presented to him... and he immediately followed the Lord. The opportunity presented itself and he took advantage of it.

Maybe you have had the same kind of thinking that a lot of believers (unfortunately) have had: “*(You know) I can serve the Lord anytime.*”

What's the hurry? ... If I decide to not live for Him today... or take advantage of present opportunities... I can always serve the Lord some other time... when it is more convenient." ... But hold the phone! This is not true. It may sound good... but it is not true. Your opportunities to follow Christ may be gone tomorrow. Why?

1. Disability: You may become disabled or sick where you are hindered from or limited in your service to Christ.

2. Desire: You may become spiritually cold and hard and have no desire to live for Christ.

3. Death: You could die.

4. Difficulty: Others that need to be reached for Christ may become harder toward the gospel, they may move out of reach, or they may die without the Lord.

5. Deceptive Conclusions The drum beat of Jesus Christ beats the cadence of TODAY and living for the Lord NOW!

The ripple of Matthew's immediate decision would have long-lasting consequences. God used Matthew to pen one of the four gospels. He has been honored by being the first book in the New Testament.

Once Matthew walked away from his career as a tax collector... he did a wise and wonderful thing. He made a great feast and invited all of his old friends to come and meet his new Friend. Evidently Levi had **no** regrets about giving up everything to follow Jesus. He even hosted his own good-bye party. What is so wonderful about Levi is that surrendering everything made him "*the happiest man in the world.*" He was so filled with deep... inner delight ... that he immediately arranged an expensive celebration feast!

A great number of tax-collectors showed up for the party. The word translated “others” here is the Greek word *allos* (which means: “others of the same kind.”) These were “others who were ostracized by society.” ...

Levi had the means to do it big - and he did! The large crowd would have required extra servants and a substantial outlay of money... but that was fine with Levi. They feasted and fully enjoyed the finest cuisine and wine of Palestine.

Levi hosted the feast as a celebration of what had happened to him. ... The ex-tax collector regarded the change in his life as an occasion for rejoicing. (I am sure that you know this... but *maybe* not. At least it will serve as a good reminder...) **Nothing is a greater occasion for rejoicing than conversion!** Please consider what Bishop Ryle wrote:

It is a far more important event than being married, or coming of age, or being made a nobleman, or receiving a great fortune. It is the birth of an immortal soul! It is the rescue of a sinner from hell! It is a passage from death to life! It is being made a king and priest for evermore! It is being provided for, both in time and eternity! It is adoption into the noblest and richest of all families, the family of God!

(Folks!) - Coming to know Christ is a great reason to party! ... So... Levi put on quite the banquet. ... As courses were served... cups were filled and refilled... and the lamps burnt low... into the evening... Jesus engaged needy souls in conversation... and Levi’s satisfaction (no doubt) swelled.

... [P A U S E] ...

Luke 5:30

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law did not share Levi’s joy. ... The Pharisees were upset because (in the East) table fellowship meant (and for the most part still means) - full acceptance. ... To eat with someone is to

say: *“I have no reservations about you. We are one.”* ... Jesus sat down with these despised tax collectors... betrayers of the Jewish people. ... We might liken it today to sitting down with *active* Antifa agitators... gay and lesbian leaders... or outspoken leaders of the opposite political party you belong to ...(people that you are convinced are trying to destroy our nation.) ... The Pharisees were understandably horror-stricken.

The judgment by the Pharisees is not necessarily (overly) harsh. It may accurately describe these people... they **were** scoundrels! ... But for Jesus... recovery is the issue - not quarantine.

What Luke makes clear is that outsiders should be invited to become “insiders.” Those who are being made into the image of Jesus should **seek** the lost and relate to them in a way that allows the offer of God’s grace to be extended to **them**. If Jesus sought to save the lost... how much more should His followers?

It never occurred to the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law that their lack of concern for sinners (and their cavalier mercilessness)... had distanced them from God. ...These “experts” had the Scriptures... but they had failed to truly read them. ... (For example) when the prophet Micah stated the Lord’s case against Israel in the sixth chapter of his prophecy... he concluded by asking: *“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8). From Micah’s perspective... the Pharisees’ lack of concern for others indicated that they were completely out of sync with the heart of God. The parallel account of Levi’s own account of his calling in Matthew 9:13... records an extra line from Jesus: *“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ ”* ... This is a reference to Hosea 6:6 where

Hosea (like Micah) condemns Israel for not caring for others. ... Hosea 6:6 reads: “*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*” ... Evidently Hosea’s words were immensely important to Jesus. ... They lay at the heart of His mission.

Those who did not care about sinners were not only out of accord with Christ but were separate from Him. Their mercilessness was a sign of their unregenerate hearts. The truth of Hosea 6:6 meant so much to Jesus that he apparently referenced it again in the Sermon on the Mount: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). Superficial religious activity without love and mercy for needy sinners - means **nothing**.

The Pharisees had religiously taken themselves right out of their faith. They had all the civilities. Their conversation was a *collage of Scriptures and holy allusions*. ... They never swore. ... They kept their homes in order. ... They regularly attended synagogue. ... They were “good people.” - **They had no apparent need**.

Does this ever happen to Christians? ... Have **YOU** strayed off mission...? How often do you consider who the Lord wants you to show mercy toward?

Luke 5:31-32

The reply adopts the Pharisees’ perspective... and there is a note of sarcasm in it. ... Jesus is the physician of the soul... and it makes sense for Him to be with those who are sick with sin. ... He came to minister to those who were sick with sin. (Those who can see their need.)

Maybe your need is a healing of the soul that (for the first time in your life) you want to become a follower of Christ. You know that there is a hole in

your heart... a void... a yearning for God's supernatural presence (His love... forgiveness... and leading.) That is being made available to you right now. ... Simply reach out and receive His love and forgiveness. All the punishment that you deserve has been paid by Christ on the cross. Believe that it has been done. Receive God's forgiveness.

If you recognize that you have a need... then the gospel is for you. Christ can (and will) save you. If you are self-sufficient... recognize no personal need... and go in your self-chosen pathway - it will lead you to destruction. I am sorry. The Great Physician can do nothing for those who think they are not sick. ... The gospel is really for those who recognize their need.

The physician seeks to call people to see themselves honestly... as they really are. ... They are ready to let God work on them. ... This willingness to rest in God... and have Him enter their life... is the essence of repentance.

But you may be listening to me right now... and God is revealing a different kind of illness. You may be straying way off mission. God may be showing you that a problem exists because you are having NOTHING TO DO with His mission of showing mercy. You are not really interested in being His hands and feet – especially to society's outcasts (people who are difficult to love.)

The same is true for you. Jesus is the physician of the soul but the Great Physician can do nothing for those who do not think they are sick. Repent before Him.