

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Tax Collectors and Sinners Draw near to Him."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we have reached Luke 15. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Luke 15:1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

You may be seated. Let's pray.

We have The Exchange approaching. Hopefully you received some information about it recently. It is a program that will help us learn to share the gospel and be more evangelistic.

Fittingly, we have reached the chapter that contains the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost sons, and shows the Lord's heart for the perhaps more than any chapter in Scripture.

The verses at the beginning of the chapter discuss Jesus's relationship with people who were considered the worst in society: **tax collectors and sinners**.

Let me explain tax collectors because we will see them throughout the sermon...

Eight times in the synoptic Gospels it says tax collectors and sinners, instead of murderers and sinners or adulterers and sinners.

Why is it written this way, as though being a tax collector is the worst sin imaginable?

Because to the Jew, it pretty much was!

- The Romans severely taxed the Jews, and the tax collectors who collected the taxes for Rome were Jews. he Jews hated the Romans and the tax collectors who worked for them were Jewish, which made them traitors to their own people.
- Tax collectors were wealthy and it was a wealth made off the backs of their already oppressed brethren.
- Tax collectors had to collect a certain amount and anything they collected over that amount they were able to keep for themselves. Because they worked for Rome they had Rome's support, which prevented Jews from resisting them.
- Levi was a tax collector, and he became one of Jesus' disciples, had his name changed to Matthew and wrote the Gospel bearing his name.

Tax collectors were notoriously dishonest. When they came to be baptized by John...

Luke 3:12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."

Basically, John said to stop stealing because that's what they were known for.

We will see how Jesus was able to deal with tax collectors and sinners while remaining holy, which sets a good example for us. We should ask how we can be evangelistic and reach out to unholy people without becoming unholy ourselves.

Let's briefly consider whether unholy people pose any threat to us. Mark your spot in Luke and turn a few books to the left to **Haggai 2**.

This is the third to last book of the Old Testament.

I believe we've looked at these verses before so I'm going to go through them quickly.

Here's the context...

After the Jews returned to the Promised Land following their exile in Babylon, they wrongly believed two things about holiness:

1. They believed doing holy things like rebuilding the temple or offering sacrifices would make them holy.
2. They believed being in the Holy Land would make them holy.

They didn't understand these things wouldn't make them holy if they were living unholy lives. God sent the prophet Haggai to correct their understanding.

Look at **verse 10**...

Haggai 2:10 On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, 11 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law:

Haggai is going to ask the priests two questions about the law, and considering they are the experts in the law, they would know the answers better than anyone else.

Here's the first question...

Haggai 2:12 'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered and said, "No."

Haggai asked, what happens when something holy touches something unholy? Does what is unholy become holy?

The priests correctly answered, "No."

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Holiness can't be transferred.

Think about it like this:

- Healthy people can't walk through a hospital and touch sick people and make them healthy.
- We can't take non-spoiled food and touch spoiled food and make it non-spoiled.

Similarly, holy people can't touch unholy people and make them holy:

- Holiness isn't contagious.
- It doesn't rub off on others.

Look at the second question...

Haggai 2:13 Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean."

Unclean is synonymous with unholy.

So now Haggai asked, "What happens when something unholy touches something holy? Does whatever is unholy cause whatever is holy to become unholy?"

And the answer is, yes!

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Unholiness can be transferred.

The first question was about whether something holy can touch something unholy and make it holy. This second question is about whether something unholy can touch something holy and make it unholy...and it can!

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This is why Paul wrote...

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

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Here's the applications for us...

Maybe you've heard people say, "We're going to take this unholy thing from the world – such as this movie, book, or music – and sanctify it or make it holy."

But this isn't possible. If it's unholy in the world, it's unholy:

- In our lives
- In our families
- In our homes
- Or in our churches

And if we introduce anything unholy from the world into our lives, families, homes, or churches, it makes our lives, families, homes, or churches unholy.

Jerry Bridges said, "*Holiness begins in our minds and works out in our actions. That being true, what we allow to enter our minds is critically important. The television programs we watch, the movies we attend, the books and magazines we read, the music we listen to, and the conversations we have all affect our minds. We need to evaluate the effects of these using Philippians 4:8 as a standard. Are the thoughts stimulated by these true? Are they pure? Lovely? Admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy?*"

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Now what about when we are talking – not about unholy things – but unholy people...like tax collectors and sinners? Can they pose a threat to our holiness?

Absolutely!

Listen to these verses about the dangers of unholy people rubbing off on us...

Proverbs 22:24 Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, 25 lest you LEARN HIS WAYS AND ENTANGLE YOURSELF IN A SNARE.

The angry person doesn't learn to control himself by being with the believer.

But the believer learns to be like the angry man and gets himself entangled in a trap.

Proverbs 13:20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

The companion of fools doesn't save fools through their relationship.

But the companion of fools suffers, because the fool's foolishness rubs off on him.

Proverbs 14:7 Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.

Notice people are told to leave the presence of fools versus spend time with them to make them wise.

One reason is because fools don't listen. The other reason is so their foolishness doesn't rub off on us.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

Good company doesn't fix bad morals, but **bad company ruins good morals.**

Paul says **do not be deceived** because we can be deceived into thinking associating with the wrong people won't hurt us. We can believe their poor behavior isn't contagious...but it is.

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So here's the question as we approach **Luke 15** and focus on evangelism...

How can we be evangelistic and reach out to unholy people, without becoming unholy ourselves?

Let me give you three recommendations that are rooted in Scripture. And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Keep unholiness out of your life by (part one) evangelizing versus compromising.

Consider these two verses:

- 1. Galatians 5:13 You were called to freedom, brothers. Only DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FLESH, but through love serve one another.**
- 2. 1 Peter 2:16 Live as people who are free, NOT USING YOUR FREEDOM AS A COVER-UP FOR EVIL, but living as servants of God.**

One of the most common times people might **use [their] freedom as an opportunity for the flesh and as a cover up for evil** is in evangelism. They spend time with unsaved people and do unholy things.

They might say something like, "*Jesus hung out with tax collectors and sinners, so...*"

- "*I am going to this bar because I want to share the Gospel.*"
- "*I'm close friends with these ungodly people because I want to see them become Christians.*"
- "*I go to this club, because I want to witness to the people going with me.*"

Is this true, or are these just sinful ways to feed the flesh?

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This is a fitting verse that can apply to our evangelism...

James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

I know this is primarily about caring for the less fortunate, but a secondary point is that when we engage in religious activity we must keep ourselves **unstained from the world**. We are not to let the world's unholiness rub off on us.

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Consider that in relationships we generally connect regarding our commonalities.

If you think about the people you are closest with you probably have things in common that are important to both of you:

- Maybe it's sports
- Maybe it's books

- Maybe it's movies
- Maybe it's automobiles
- Maybe it's school

If you're a Christian with another Christian, then you have Christ in common.

But what does a Christian and a non-Christian have in common?

- They don't have the New Man, or a love for Christ in common.
- But they do have the Old Man, or the flesh in common.

Believers and unbelievers are not going to connect spiritually. They're going to connect along the basest level: the flesh.

J. Budziszewski said, *"God wants you to rub off on non-Christians friends, but Satan wants them to rub off on you. So remember: you can have friends outside the faith, but for your deepest comrades you should look to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Hang out with the holy. Get in with the godly. Spend time with the saved. Know who your real family is – the one where the Father is God."*

Thomas Brooks said, *"Let your closest companions be those who have made Christ their closest companion."*

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The next part of lesson three...

Lesson Three: Keep unholiness out of your life by (part two) pointing tax collectors and sinners to the Physician.

Go ahead and turn to **Luke 5** to see Jesus's approach...

Look at **verse 27**...

Luke 5:27 After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." **28** And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. **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. **30** And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

The religious leaders didn't like Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and sinners. This is what sets up the parables in **Luke 15**.

Think about when a prostitute washed Jesus' feet with her hair and tears, and then kissed his feet and anointed them with oil...

Luke 7:39 When the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

When we think we are too good to be around certain people, we are acting like the religious leaders. And whenever we act like the religious leaders it is almost always bad.

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Look how Jesus responds...

Luke 5:31 And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Jesus is a **Physician** for sinners. He knew people were desperately sick and in need of healing:

- Earthly physicians heal physical sickness, but Jesus heals spiritual sickness.

- Earthly physicians work on the body, but Jesus works on the soul.

Look a few verses earlier at Jesus healing the paralytic.

Before Jesus healed him physically, He first healed him spiritually...

Luke 5:20 Man, your sins are forgiven you.

Despite how terrible the man looked physically, He looked even worse spiritually. Jesus dealt with his greatest need, which was his spiritual sickness.

The word **physician** helps us understand Jesus's relationship with tax collectors and sinners, and it is a good example for us in our evangelism and outreach.

Think about what **physicians** do....

First, they get close to their patients, but they make every effort to ensure they aren't contaminated or infected by them:

- They sanitize their hands
- They put on gloves
- They wear mask

Second, physicians help:

- They diagnose.
- They carry a clipboard because they're investigating
- They try to figure out what's wrong
- They prescribe a cure and tell people what to do...or not to do.
- They want to see healing take place.
- They have a specific purpose.

Nobody ever says:

- *"Hey, I'm going to go hang out with my physician"*
- *"My physician just called and he wants to go catch a football game."*

Instead, people say:

- *"I'm sick. I need to go see my physician."*
- *"I need help. I'm going to go to the doctor."*

Think about when you're at the hospital and the doctor walks in:

- He doesn't walk in and give you a hug and chit-chat with you for 45 minutes
- He doesn't ask you to come over later for dinner.

And Jesus's ministry is similar. Notice the balance:

- He spent time with tax collectors and sinners. He socialized with them.
- But He wasn't buddies or close friends with them.

And it's a good example to follow...

We should have unbelievers in our lives, but:

- The relationship should be deliberate, intentional...like Jesus modeled. We look for opportunities to share the Gospel.

- Instead of being close friends, we point them to the Great Physician...because only He can take away their sickness.

Spurgeon said, *"Lord, grant that whenever I am found in the company of sinners, it may be with the design of healing them, and may I never become myself infected with their disease!"*

By God's grace, one of the greatest blessings in my life took place in my early twenties. I had some Christian friends who were deliberate in their relationships with me. Their greatest desire was sharing the Gospel and directing me to the Physician.

I hope I can be as intentional with others as these believers were with me.

Now continuing the physician analogy, what does the Physician prescribe? What is the prescription?

The answer is in **verse 32...**

Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Repentance is the prescription for the spiritually sick...

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the word **righteous** and write "self-righteous."

Romans 3:10 none is righteous, no, not one.

There are no righteous people. Jesus is only talking about people who THINK they are righteous.

Next, notice the phrase **call sinners to repentance**.

Jesus didn't come to call the self-righteous to repentance, because they don't think they're sick. He came to call sinners to repentance, because they know they're sick.

1 Timothy 1:15 Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This was His purpose. The religious leaders criticized Him for being with tax collectors and sinners, but considering who He was and what He was supposed to do, any other behavior wouldn't have made sense:

- If you're a pediatrician, you're going to help children.
- If you're a veterinarian you're going to help animals.
- If you're a physician, you're going to help the sick.

And if you're a Savior, you're going to help sinners.

One reason Jesus might have chosen Matthew, a tax collector, so early in his ministry, was to make Himself look sensitive to sinners.

When people found out Jesus called a tax collector, they'd know He wouldn't turn anyone away.

The religious leaders on the other hand couldn't be more different than Jesus. They tried to stay as far away from sinners as possible.

What's ironic – and sad – is if the religious leaders were as righteous, or as spiritually healthy as they thought they were, then they should've been the most concerned with sinners, or the spiritually sick.

Imagine doctors who never went around sick people because they thought they were too healthy for them.

The fact is if you're spiritually healthy, you should try to help those who are spiritually sick.

Listen to this verse, which makes the point...

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression (which is to say is spiritually sick), **you who are spiritual** (this mean spiritually healthy) **should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**

Or lest you become spiritually sick too...or in other words, their unholiness rubs off on you.

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Now go ahead and turn to the end of **Luke 14**

We are getting closer to **Luke 15**, aren't we?

I want to show you something truly incredible.

Hopefully you remember these verses at the end of Luke 14, which I believe are the strongest in all of Scripture regarding discipleship, or regarding following Christ.

Just to briefly remind you:

- In **verse 26** he says if anyone wants to follow him but doesn't hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even their own life, they can't be his disciple.
- In **verse 27** he says whoever won't carry their cross can't be his disciple.
- In **verses 28-32** he tells everyone to count the cost before deciding to follow him.
- In **verse 33** he says if people aren't willing to give up any of their possessions they can't be his disciple.
- Finally, in **verses 34 and 35** he says salt that has lost its taste, or that has become worthless, illustrating worthless disciples, is good for nothing but being thrown out.

I don't think it is too much to say that these are some of the most challenging versus Jesus preached.

And why did he preach them?

Look back at **verse 25** for the answer...

Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,

Jesus knew these crowds were bloated. They were filled with people who weren't true disciples. He wanted to trim the fat and thin the ranks.

If you have been with us on Sunday nights, Pastor Nathan has been teaching on the life of Gideon. Think about him beginning with 32,000 people and whittling them down to 300. It seems like Jesus did that!

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And after laying down this incredibly challenging charge to those following him, guess who's going to turn away and guess who's going to remain?

Look at **Luke 15:1**...

Luke 15:1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all DRAWING NEAR TO HEAR HIM.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

Lesson Four: Tax collectors and sinners who know they're sick draw near to Jesus.

Can you believe that? Jesus preached some of the most challenging verses on discipleship in all of Scripture and the tax collectors and sinners not only remained, but drew closer to him.

The great crowds were gone, but the tax collectors and sinners were left.

Why is that?

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

These people knew they were sinners, and they were tired of their sin:

- They didn't want to be spiritually sick any longer.
- They wanted to be made well.

Even in the secular world there's an understanding that people often have to reach rock bottom before they'll change. This is also often the case spiritually:

- People have to be tired of being spiritually sick.
- They have to want to be made well.

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In next week's sermon we will see that not everyone – in particular the religious leaders – was happy about Jesus helping these people.

He responds to their criticisms by teaching some of the most endearing parables in the Gospels: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons.

Each parable reveals the Lord's heart for the tax collectors and sinners – the spiritually sick – of the world to be made well.

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The beautiful truth is this...

- If you're spiritually sick, there is a Physician who wants to make you well.
- Jesus wouldn't turn away tax collectors and sinners in his day and he doesn't turn them away in our day.

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.