

“THE GREAT PHYSICIAN MAKES A CALL”

I. Introduction

- A. The basic assumption in the liberal church’s corruption of Christianity is that Jesus’s ethical teachings and moral example comprise the essence of the Christian religion.
- B. This causes liberal preachers to mine the Gospels for material that can be used to provide some moral lesson that will resonate with the mainstream moral outlook of our culture.
- C. For example, the verses that we have just read might be used to make the point that we should be open and affirming towards all people and should never make any moral judgments about their lifestyle or their character.
- D. I hope that you can see the problem with handling this passage in such a way.
- E. It totally ignores what Jesus says about sin and repentance.
- F. As we study this text today, we will see that Jesus came into the world as the great Physician of souls.
- G. He came to call fallen man out of his sin-sick condition and into a state of spiritual wholeness and integrity.

II. A Call that Is Effective

- A. Our passage begins by showing us the effectiveness of the great Physician’s call.
 - 1. Luke tells us that as Jesus went out one day, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth.

2. This Levi was also known by the name Matthew, the same Matthew who would later write the first Gospel.
 3. While tax collectors are unpopular in all cultures, they were especially hated in first century Israel.
 4. To understand why, we need to know something about the taxation system that the Romans set up.
 5. Rome farmed out the task of tax collection to the highest bidder, and anything that was collected above the amount that the person pledged to collect for Rome was his to keep.
 6. As you might imagine, this system was ripe for abuse.
 7. It was also a system that forced Jews to support a government that they did not want to have over them in the first place.
 8. This caused the Jews to view tax collectors as corrupt collaborators with Israel's oppressors.
- B. We should take note of the fact that Jesus sought Levi out.
1. Levi was not searching for Jesus.
 2. Jesus sought Levi and called him to follow him.
 3. This illustrates what Jesus taught his disciples in the Upper Room Discourse, saying, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide". (John 15:16 ESV)
 4. That mention of fruit-bearing ministry reminds us that Jesus not only called Levi to be a disciple, he also called him to be an apostle.
 5. We might wonder why Jesus would choose someone as low and despised as a tax collector for such an important office.

6. It would seem that he did it in order to provide an example of the grace that God extends to his people in the gospel.
 7. In other words, Jesus called Levi to himself in order to express the same truth that the apostle Paul taught when he wrote these words to the church in Corinth: "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Cor 1:26–29 ESV)
- C. Levi responded to Jesus's call by leaving everything and following the Lord.
1. This shows us the power of Christ's word.
 2. When he calls a sinner to himself, that call is effective.
 3. To use language from our Confession of Faith, it is a call that convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the truth, and renews our wills so that we are able to embrace Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel.
 4. Notice that this effectual call caused Levi to leave his tax booth.
 5. That booth was the place where customs were collected on the goods that were transported on that road.
 6. In leaving his post so suddenly, Levi was making a definitive break with his former life.
 7. There would be no possibility of going back.
- D. This is a picture of what discipleship looks like for every Christian.

1. You may not have to do what Levi did in a literal sense, but you do owe Christ the same kind of commitment and devotion.
 2. You are to count everything else as rubbish compared to being found in Christ.
 3. You must be willing to let go of anything in this world if it becomes necessary to do so in order to remain faithful to your Lord and Savior.
 4. There may be times in your life when you need to let go of something for Christ's sake.
 5. It might be a relationship that you hold dear, or something that brings you pleasure, or something in which you find security.
 6. As Jesus says elsewhere, we must deny ourselves if we are going to follow him.
- E. This is a point that today's Christians need to ponder, because there is good reason to believe that we are going to be faced with more and more situations that test our loyalty to Jesus.
1. There are plenty of examples of how this is already happening in the West, even in our own nation.
 2. A high court in Sweden recently ruled that a Christian midwife needs to be willing to perform abortions if she wants to keep her job.
 3. The Washington state Supreme Court has ruled that a Christian florist had no right to refuse her services when she was asked to do the floral arrangements for a same-sex wedding ceremony.
 4. And some public school systems are beginning to mandate that their teachers teach the LGBT ideology as normative.

5. What will you do if you are put in a position where you have to decide between keeping your job and being faithful to Jesus?
6. We need to prepare ourselves for such scenarios by remembering that Christian discipleship means being willing to leave everything for Christ's sake.
7. As one writer puts it, "any job, no matter how benign, that compels one to affirm something un-Christian and untrue is not worth keeping, no matter what the cost." [Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 185]

III. A Call that Is Issued to Sinners

- A. This brings us to the second point that we are considering in this sermon, which is that the great Physician's call is issued to sinners.
 1. After leaving his tax booth, Levi held a great feast so that he could invite all of his friends to come and meet Jesus.
 2. This is the sort of thing that you often see new converts doing.
 3. New converts frequently have a great amount of zeal to tell others about Christ.
 4. They also tend to have a lot of opportunities to do so, since most of their friends and acquaintances are non-Christians.
 5. That certainly would have been the case with Levi.
 6. The fact that tax collectors were so despised by religious folk in Israel led tax collectors to seek consolation in the company of the irreligious and the immoral.
 7. This means that, in addition to the other tax collectors who were present at Levi's great feast, there probably also would have been an assortment of drunkards, adulterers, and prostitutes.

- B. The Pharisees and the scribes held that it was scandalous for a devout Jew to be present at a gathering of such people.
 - 1. They believed that a person who enjoyed table fellowship with such sinners would be religiously defiled.
 - 2. Their view was essentially 'salvation by separation.'
 - 3. If a Jew wanted to maintain a right status before God, he had to avoid close interactions with people of such low character.
 - 4. While there is an element of truth in this, as we will see in a moment, it is clear that the Pharisees went too far in this area.
 - 5. They had built a hedge around the law, and that hedge ended up becoming an addition to the law.
 - 6. They were essentially suggesting that Jesus was sinning simply by attending this feast, which was not true.

- C. Having said this, we should also realize that Jesus's willingness to share a meal with Levi and his friends is sometimes misapplied.
 - 1. This text does not give us warrant to party it up with those who are ungodly.
 - 2. We need to remember that we are not Jesus.
 - 3. Jesus was able to do some things that we cannot do.
 - 4. For example, when Jesus touched the leper, the leper was made clean, but if anyone else had touched that leper, the leper would have made that person unclean.
 - 5. While we certainly should be welcoming to those who are still lost in their sins, we also need to be careful not to participate in their sin.

6. The Scriptures issue clear warnings along these lines.
 7. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company ruins good morals."
 8. And 2 Corinthians 6:17 says this: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you'".
 9. In short, we always need to be mindful of the fact that while we are called to be *in* the world, we are not to be *of* the world.
- D. Jesus responded to the objection of the scribes and Pharisees with this memorable saying: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."
1. Now, of course, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that every single one of us is plagued by the sickness that Jesus is talking about here.
 2. There is no one righteous, not even one.
 3. Yet there are people who think that they are righteous, people like the Pharisees.
 4. They did not see themselves as sinners, and this meant that Jesus could be of no help to them.
- E. There are plenty of people like this in the world today.

1. Ironically, some of these people are not religious at all.
2. Yet the thing that they have in common with the Pharisees is that they have no sense of their spiritual sickness.
3. They think that they are just fine.
4. They think that all that they need to do in order to get into heaven is die.
5. And then there are other people who put their confidence in their efforts at securing a righteous standing in the eyes of the world.
6. Such people use social media and other tactics to engage in what has been termed as “virtue signaling”, a practice that enables a person to declare that he or she is in line with the prevailing cultural conception of what righteousness looks like on any given issue.
7. Make no mistake — there are many Pharisees in the world today, and they can be found in surprising places.
8. Sometimes, they can even be found in our own hearts.
9. We can get so fixated on other people’s failings — sometimes real failings, and sometimes perceived failings — that we fail to reckon with the evil that dwells within us.
10. Let us never forget that we are no better than anyone else.
11. We are all sin-sick and in need of the cure that only Jesus can bring.
12. We have that cure in our hands: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.
13. So even when our unsaved neighbors have no burden for their souls, let us be burdened for them.

14. Let us follow Levi's example by doing what we can to introduce our fellow sinners to Jesus.

IV. A Call to Repentance

- A. We turn now to our third point, which is that the call of the great Physician is a call to repentance.
 1. Jesus makes this clear in verse 32 when he says, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."
 2. In other words, the call is not, 'Come to Jesus just as you are and remain as you are.'
 3. Instead, it is, 'Come to Jesus just as you are to be cleansed of your sins so that you can live a new life and follow him.'
 4. Christ does not pardon our sins so that we can continue wallowing in them.
 5. This is the point that Jesus is making in using the metaphor of a physician.
 6. He has come in order to heal us of our sin-sickness.
 7. He calls us to himself so that we can live a devout and holy life in him.
- B. This means ongoing repentance is a vital part of the Christian life.
 1. The day you trusted in Christ was the day you were enlisted in a conflict that will last for as long as you live in this world.
 2. You are called to fight against sin with all your might, whatever the cost, in constant reliance upon the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.
 3. Sin is a disease.

4. It is the most dreadful and most devastating disease that has ever been known.
5. It is the sickness unto spiritual and eternal death.
6. This is why you must never make peace with sin.
7. This is why you must not let yourself justify your sin.
8. This is why you must persevere not only in faith, but also in repentance.
9. Consider these thoughts from the great Puritan Thomas Brooks: "A soul given up to sin is a soul ripe for hell, a soul posting to destruction. Ah Lord! this mercy I humbly beg, that whatever thou givest me up to, thou wilt not give me up to the ways of my own heart; if thou wilt give me up to be afflicted, or tempted, or reproached, I will patiently sit down, and say, It is the Lord; let him do with me what seems good in his own eyes. Do anything with me, lay what burden thou wilt upon me, so thou dost not give me up to the ways of my own heart." [*Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, 51]

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to affirm people and make them feel good about living according to their desires.
 1. Jesus came into this world to save people from that deplorable condition.
 2. He came to cure sin-sick souls.
 3. He is the only one who can provide such healing.
 4. And he has promised that he will never turn away any sinner who comes to him in faith.

5. Even the most wretched sinners are invited to come to him and be made clean.
- B. So bring your defilement to Christ.
1. Go to him daily for cleansing and renewal.
 2. Trust him to lead you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
 3. If he did these things for a tax-collector like Levi, he will surely do them for sinners like you and me.