

## Reaching Out To The Lost

Luke 5:27-32

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Dear ones, do you have a heart for those who are perishing? Do we earnestly desire and pray for the salvation of those who are without Christ? The Christian who does not care that there are sinners without Christ who are perishing all around him is like one who is cast into the raging sea after the ship he was in has sunk. He is ready to go under for the last time when a strong hand from a life boat reaches down and pulls him out of his watery grave. Rejoicing at the mercy shown to him, he snuggles up in a warm, thick blanket, and then turns a deaf ear to all those who are yet perishing in the water. Now that he is rescued, the rest can perish. After all, if God would have them rescued, they will see the boat and miraculously pull themselves into the boat.

This, sadly to say, is the attitude and practice of many within Reformed Churches. “We do not need to go to them, if the Lord is really working in their lives, they will come to us and visit us here within the comfortable four walls of this building.” Dear ones, how can we ever justify such an indifferent spirit when eternal souls are at stake? What would you think of a neighbor who happened to look out the window of her safe, comfortable house to see her neighbor’s house on fire? But rather than doing all she could to help (by calling the fire department, by seeing if there was any way to help rescue those inside), she closed her curtains, prayed a brief prayer for her perishing neighbors to the effect that if it be God’s will that her neighbors be saved that God might save them and then went to bed? Dear ones, one of the evidences of the Spirit’s operation in our own lives is that of love not only for our brethren, but love for our neighbor—our lost and perishing neighbor.

Neither our doctrinal orthodoxy, nor our purity of worship should hinder in the least our evangelistic zeal and desire to minister to those who are without Christ. In fact, to the contrary, the more we grow in understanding the mercy of Christ in rescuing us from the eternal misery we deserved, the more we should find that same mercy being reproduced in our own lives and driving us to pray, weep, fast, and seek out family members, friends, and strangers who are without Christ. A firm conviction in the sovereignty of God in saving those who from all eternity He has chosen to save cannot be inconsistent with our sincere and fervent desires, prayers, words, and deeds to lead the lost to Christ, who alone can save them—otherwise we must condemn Christ and His apostles who went out and compelled all who heard to come to the wedding feast which was prepared.

Let us consider today from our text, the example and mission of the Lord in ministering to those who were perishing. I would have you consider the following main points from Luke 5:27-32: (1) The Call of Levi (Luke 5:27-28); (2) The Response of Levi To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:29); (3) The Response of The Pharisees To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:30); (4) The Response of Christ To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:31-32).

## **I. The Call of Levi (Luke 5:27-28).**

A. After the Lord had stunned the unbelieving Pharisees by claiming the authority to forgive the sin of the helpless paralytic (in the previous verses of Luke 5), He apparently went from the house wherein the miracle was performed and walked out to the seashore there in Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. This is the same general location

where the Lord had earlier called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him as His disciples.

B. As the Lord walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He stopped at a booth where taxes were collected (perhaps taxes upon the very fish that were caught by fishermen there in the Sea of Galilee). There the Lord saw a wealthy tax collector by the name of Levi (whom we also know as Matthew according to Matthew 9:9 and who also was the inspired author of the Gospel of Matthew).

C. Jesus then called this tax collector to leave his lucrative job and follow Him as one of His appointed disciples (no doubt to the amazement of those who were with Christ). A tax collector as one of Christ's disciples? After all, it's one thing to call lowly fishermen to be disciples (at least fishing is an honorable vocation), but to call a tax collector to be a disciple (this is quite another thing altogether). For most Jews viewed a publican (or tax collector) as about as dishonorable of a profession as that of a harlot. Publicans were generally hated by the Jews for the following reasons:

1. They worked either directly or indirectly for the hated Romans who oppressed the Jews in Palestine—thus, they were traitors.
2. They made themselves unclean through their constant contact with unbelieving Gentiles—thus, they were profane.
3. They raised the taxes of the people excessively so as to pad their own wallets—thus, they were thieves.

D. In the gospels, we find publicans joined with sinners as a cliché—"publicans and sinners" (not only here in Luke 5:30, but also in Matthew 11:19; Luke 15:1). Publicans (tax collectors) were often disqualified from serving as a judge or as a witness in a court of law; and were excommunicated from the synagogue (cf. Matthew 18:17).

E. But the Lord Jesus said to this publican, “Follow Me.” Jesus called those who in the eyes of society were the most undeserving to be His disciples, so as to magnify His grace in them. Christ called even one who considered himself to be the chief of sinners to be His disciple. In one sense, the salvation of Paul the Pharisee of Pharisees was even a greater miracle than the salvation of Levi (or Matthew) the publican. For the self-righteousness of the Pharisee did not so much as allow him to see his need of a Savior. His good works were (in his opinion) that which would make him acceptable before God (Luke 18:10-14). At least the publican and the sinner knew they were sinners, which the Pharisee was to self-righteous to confess.

1. When we speak of the salvation that God has wrought in our lives, let those who have not necessarily been saved from such gross sins as others, not believe they do not have a testimony to share of the amazing grace of God, for they have been saved from perhaps an even greater sin than drunkenness, fornication, theft, or murder. They have been saved from the sin of self-righteousness—perhaps the most heinous sin and one which deceived and led me away from Christ as well in my youth.

2. Dear ones, the calling of Levi and the calling of Paul emphasize that salvation is a free gift sovereignly bestowed by the Lord, whether it be accomplished in the life of the scandalous or in the life of the self-righteous, and it does not depend upon the work of man, but rather upon the abundant grace of Christ.

F. Although Levi had probably heard Christ preach before along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the response of obedient faith manifested itself as he left his vocation to follow Christ. He denied himself, took up his cross, and followed Christ. He counted the riches of knowing and following Christ to be of more value to him than the riches of this world (Philippians 3:7-9). How did Moses manifest his faith in the Lord? Read

Hebrews 11:24-26. Likewise, dear ones, an evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ is our willingness to forsake the things of this life (the comforts, the pleasures, the possessions, the family and friends if necessary) in order to follow Christ. As a Christian, we give up our claim to everything in our life for the sake of Christ. Our life is no longer the things of this world, but now our life is Jesus Christ. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

## **II. The Response of Levi To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:29).**

A. After Levi was called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, he did not first go to the remotest parts of the world to lead people to Christ, but first began with his own acquaintances by inviting them to his home to hear the gospel from the mouth of Christ. Just as the man who was cleansed of the legion of demons in Luke 8 was first to go and proclaim the good news of God’s mercy to his own family and friends, so likewise Levi begins with those whom he knows and who knew him before going to complete strangers. He invites them to a feast where more than mere food is on the menu—the forgiveness of sin, the imputed righteousness of Christ, and everlasting life.

B. You see, dear ones, Levi, having been rescued by the Lord, could not leave his friends who were also perishing to drown in their own sin without extending to them a hand to lead them out of their watery grave and into the ark of salvation. The text says that many publicans and sinners gathered to eat with the Lord and hear him.

C. Are we like Levi in praying for and seeking out those who are without Christ? Our first duty is to our own family. We must begin there, but we must also let our children hear and see that we have a burden for others who are without Christ as well. Christ says to us as He said to His

disciples long ago, “Open your eyes, the fields are ripe to harvest.” How do we really think that the covenanted reformation for which we pray will come if we have not a burden for those who are without Christ? We are mere hypocrites if we pray for a covenanted reformation, but neglect to pray that Christ may draw family members, co-workers, neighbors, and even the nations to Himself through His glorious, mighty gospel.

### **III. The Response of The Pharisees To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:30).**

A. The word “Pharisee” means separatist (a separatist in the worse sense of that word). For the Pharisees believed that they could not have any contact with scandalous sinners, lest they be tainted with uncleanness through that contact. Their view is in some ways like that of some Calvinists today who maintain that when the wicked and the profane are ready to come to Christ, they will come to us (the Lord will draw them to us), we do not need to go to them. In fact, to go to the non-Christian, to call all who will hear to come to Christ (according to this view) is a brand of Arminianism (a man-centered salvation). But the Lord calls His ministers to invite all to come to the feast (in Matthew 22:8-10).

B. There certainly is a biblical separatism that we as Christians must maintain. We must be separate from all moral defilement by consenting to, participating in, or practicing that which is contrary to the Word of God (Psalm 1:1; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We must maintain a biblical separatism in keeping our young children out of the clutches of those who would fill their minds with ungodly ideas and practices. We must carefully screen and supervise any one with whom our children would spend time, but we must not view the non-Christian as unworthy of our time and attention when it comes to meeting with them for the

purpose of leading them to Jesus Christ. Although we cannot enjoy close and familiar fellowship with those who are not of like precious faith and practice, we must continue to pray for and reach out to all with the gospel and truth of Christ. We must not so isolate ourselves that we have no contact with those outside our church. We cannot be the light and the salt that we are called to be without some contact—contact but never compromise.

C. Dear ones, although Jonah had a very specific call from God to go and preach to the Ninevites, we must see that there is a general calling for all Christians to care for the lost, to pray for the lost, and to minister the love of Jesus Christ to the lost. Jonah would not go to the Ninevites and God was sorely displeased with Jonah, for he knew that God was merciful to all who called upon Him in truth and sincerity. He knew that God would forgive, if they called upon the Lord, and he didn't want that to happen. Jonah wanted the judgment of the Lord to fall upon the Ninevites, rather than the mercy of the Lord. Dear ones, let not the same attitude prevail in our hearts or in our homes.

#### **IV. The Response of Christ To Those Who Were Perishing (Luke 5:31-32).**

A. If you were a doctor, would the fact that you consciously chose to spend time with those who were sick infer that you liked, enjoyed, or approved of sickness? Of course not! The Lord Jesus did not sit to eat and drink with publicans and sinners because He approved of their sin, but because He came to heal them of their spiritual disease. He came to heal those who confessed that they were ill, and apparently many of these publicans and sinners were confessing their need of Christ to heal them.

B. Dear ones, Jesus is a friend to sinners. In fact, His mission in coming to this world was to call sinners to repentance. He didn't run from the wicked and the ungodly, He went to them in order to rescue them and heal them. What a comfort this truth is even to those who have already been brought to Christ through faith in Him, for we continue to sin, we continue to need the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we turn to Him, He is like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son—He is running to meet us and to throw His loving arms around us. He does not excuse or condone our sins in the least. Our sins are contemptible in His holy sight, but He came into this evil world, not to avoid sinners, but rather to save them. The Christianity which Christ proclaimed is a rescue religion. Dear ones, the church is to be a hospital for the sick. And we do not shoot our sick, but rather as doctors under Christ, seek the healing of all those infected with the deadly disease of sin. Let us then not follow the Pharisees in rejecting the sinner (simply because he is a sinner), but rather let us follow Christ in ministering to the sinner, praying for the sinner, and being a friend to publicans and sinners (Luke 7:34).

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