

For Whom Did Jesus Come? (Luke 5:27-32)

1. The Call of Matthew (v.27-28)

- Matthew (Levi) was a tax collector (publican) for Herod Antipas in the region of Capernaum. First-century Jews often had two names (usually one Hebrew or Aramaic and the other in Greek or Latin), such as Paul/Saul, Simon/Peter, and Matthew/Levi.
- Tax Collector:
 - Jews and Gentiles would “bid” for an imperial region to levy taxes. The highest bidder won an area of Roman occupation. The winner paid off the government at the end of the annual year and kept whatever he collected above and beyond the contracted agreement.
 - Matthew is not the chief tax collector but instead employed by this “highest bidder” to raise a certain amount of money in the region of Capernaum. Like the highest bidder, Matthew kept for himself whatever he could raise above and beyond the contracted agreement.
- Types of Taxes:
 - Fixed taxes: There were fixed taxes (poll tax), ground tax (1/10th of all grain, wine, or oil), and income tax (1% of earnings).
 - Variable taxes: separate duties for those who used roads, bridges, docks, imports/exports, and even sales taxes on certain items.
 - Due to a lack of public records, there was rampant graft and corruption.
- Being a Jew, Matthew was viewed as a corrupt traitor to his nation.
- In Mark’s account (Mk. 2:13), the crowds are coming to be taught when Jesus “passed” by and “saw” Levi (Matthew) sitting at the tax booth.
- His booth was in Capernaum, perhaps close to the ports on the western side of the Sea of Galilee or near a major road connecting Egypt to Syria. He was stationed there for one purpose: to collect as many taxes as possible.
- Luke informs the reader that Jesus “saw” Matthew. In Greek, this refers to contemplating, interpreting, and viewing. It means to “see, or concentrate on something to impact and influence in a significant manner.” Jesus, with this “gaze,” effectually converted and called Matthew to follow Him.
- No Gospel writer includes any previous interaction between Jesus and Matthew, let alone Matthew with any other disciple.
- Matthew’s response is like that of Peter, James, and John (5:11), who “left everything” and “followed Jesus” (v.28). This describes Matthew’s commencement and continuation of discipleship.

2. The Grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes (v.29-30)

- Matthew holds a “great feast” in his house and invites fellow tax collectors and “others.” Matthew is wealthy.
- This banquet is Matthew’s expression of initial discipleship and a responsive act of worship that sought to bring others the newfound joy of committing his life to Jesus. Jesus is the guest of honor.
- Matthew wished others to rejoice with him, as Andrew did the same with his brother Simon when he first met Jesus (John 1:41).
- Banquets were not only common in Greco-Roman circles but also in Jewish tradition that spanned back to Daniel (Dan. 5:1), Esther (5:1), and Abraham (Gen. 21:8).
- In the East, and even today, inviting a man to a meal was an honor, offering peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness. In Judaism, the table fellowship meal meant fellowship before the sight of God.
- While the banquet was in progress, the Pharisees and scribes, most likely not invited, showed up.

- These Pharisees and scribes who witnessed this “shameful gathering” wondered why Jesus (Mk. 2:16) and His disciples “ate” and “communed” with tax collectors and sinners. While they did not grumble to Jesus, they did at His disciples (Lk. 6:30). Jesus either heard them or, in His omniscience (4:23; 5:21-24), knew what was said to His disciples.
- The Greek word for this “complaining/grumbling” is an emotive term. It alludes to Israel, who grumbled against God (Ex. 15:24; Num. 14:26-35).
- As Jesus is eating and drinking with these “sinners,” He is programmatically exercising the mission of the servant of Yahweh/God incarnate. Present at this feast are the “poor, captives, blind, and oppressed.” Though many are wealthy in an earthly manner, some are poor in spirit (Lk. 4:18-19).
- By sitting and eating with sinners, Jesus identifies with them to restore them to righteousness forfeited by sin.

3. The Reason Jesus Came (v.31-32)

- Jesus uses the illustration of a doctor as an expression of His divine mandate. The Pharisees and scribes, as experts of the OT, would understand this (2 Chron. 16:12; Ezek. 34; Jer. 8:2).
- Doctors do not spend time with healthy people but with the sick.
- Jesus is expressing the boundary-crossing mission of God incarnate: to restore repentant sinners who know they are in need. Those whom the Pharisees thought were outside God’s saving purposes are welcomed.
- The Mishnah (extrabiblical rabbinic writing) extended the command of Lev. 10:10 (distinguishing between clean and unclean) to hedge against the corrupting influences of sinners. The Mishnah describes sinners as “money-lenders, people who race doves for sport, people who trade on the Sabbath, thieves, gamblers, violent men, shepherds, prostitutes, adulterers, tax collectors, Samaritans, and ‘people of the land.’”
- The Pharisees and scribes believed that by eating with sinners:
 - You agree with their lifestyle.
 - They will contaminate you in mind, body, and soul.
- They interpreted the holiness of God as extending from the temple to their households and tables and then to those at their table. They believed that any food which is eaten must be ritually clean. That means no unclean thing (Gentile or sinner) can touch it, let alone eat from the same table or plate. They would not touch sinners (7:39-40) to avoid the perception or suggestion that they supported or endorsed the sinner. They believed they would be contaminated through contact or communion with the sinner.
- The Pharisees believed in salvation by segregation, while Jesus believed in salvation by association. God delights in justice, lovingkindness, mercy, and humility (Micah 6:8; Matt. 9:13). Jesus, as the incarnate God, demonstrates God’s heart towards sinners.
- Unlike Jesus, the Pharisees preferred quarantine from all sinners. They would never go near them, let alone touch them.
- The irony is that the Pharisees are the ones who will not be invited to dine with Jesus because they are outcasts. Like the Pharisees, those in their self-complacency who imagine themselves spiritually healthy apart from Jesus will have no part in salvation.
- This banquet is a shadow and representation of the people who will be with Him in glory. To be received by Jesus is to accept His diagnosis of the human heart.
- He calls for sinners to repent (v.32), which includes the Pharisees.
- The kingdom of God is shut to all sinners who reject God’s remedy for their sin. This remedy is not in works, as the Pharisees believed, but by faith alone. Jesus Christ came for sinners who know they are sinners. These are drawn to Him in faith, leaving everything to follow Him (v.28).