

INTRO / FATHER'S DAY
VIDEO (wait for my cue)

Alright- well, we are continuing in the sermon series this morning called “the Church is...” and our message title is “sent to every culture”- the church is sent to every culture. Our passage this morning is [Luke 5:27-32](#). This passage tells us that Christ came to call sinners to repentance, and there are sinners in every culture. So in effect, the Lord calls his church to be sent into every culture to bring his good news of forgiveness and repentance.

Let's turn to [Luke 5:27-32](#) - this is the Word of God for the people of God:

[The New International Version](#) **Luke 5:27-32**

27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

31 Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Let's pray.

Lord's Prayer (wait for my cue— “and now teach us to pray, as you taught your disciples to pray...”)

Jesus came to Levi, who is also called Matthew, the tax collector while he was at his tax booth and called out to him to follow him, and we see that Levi left everything behind and followed him. Now this statement is interesting because in the next paragraph we see that even though it looks like Levi left his profession behind, he didn't leave his friends behind. Instead, we see that Levi put together a massive block party at his house, and pretty much all of his work buddies were there along with a bunch of others— and who were the others? Well, the Pharisees and religious teachers pegged the “others” as sinners in their complaint to Jesus.

So think about Levi for a moment here--- he was literally at work in a career that was hated in those days— tax collectors were some of the most despised people at that time because they apparently drove up the tax and pocketed the extra. So it was the type of career that, if you were in it, the only people you'd feel comfortable hanging around with were other tax collectors and suspicious people that didn't really care that you were dishonest because they were all dishonest themselves! So even though we don't know if Levi was dishonest or not, he was certainly comfortable enough with his tax-collecting buddies and other suspicious friends to invite them to the big party he threw for Jesus at his house. **The point here is that Levi left everything to follow Jesus except the people in his personal work culture.**

Now let's break this down a little further because I think we can learn a ton from Levi's story here. When Levi left everything to follow Jesus, he threw a huge meal for Jesus at his house— Ok, I think **the first thing to recognize here is that Levi most likely recognized his sinful lifestyle, he knew the culture he was in was not a good one— and Jesus presented a change in life that looked far better than what he was stuck in—** so he might have been that tax-collector filled with self-guilt. We can guess from the context that Levi's desire to follow Jesus was connected to a desire to repent or to get out of his dishonest way of life to live a more honorable lifestyle. So that's the first point, Levi genuinely walked toward a path of repentance evidenced by the fact that he left everything to follow Jesus.

The second point to recognize is that **even though Levi left his occupation behind, he still thought about his co-workers and friends who were all connected to that particular work culture.** He maintained his connection to those people in his life while severing his connection to the sinful patterns that were connected to that way of life. The most important thing here is that he didn't maintain his connections to his old way of life, but he managed to maintain his connections to his friends and coworkers.

When Jesus calls us out to follow him, he is not necessarily asking us to sever all of our non-Christian friendships. Now sometimes, for a time, it is good to get out of relationships and especially environments that pull you back into sinful patterns until you are strong enough to be around those cultures without falling back into those patterns. When I first starting walking with the

Lord, I had to limit my time with some of my non-Christian friends until I felt I was strong enough to hang around them without falling back into the way of life I was trying to get out of. We do see in Levi's story that Jesus called him out to leave everything, but he didn't push him to break off all contact with his old friends. Instead--- here is the third point--- **Levi kept his old friendships but he brought Jesus into those friendships.** He brought Jesus into his friendships- that is the key. In fact, he probably threw the block party specifically so that he could introduce all his friends to Jesus!

Notice in Verse 29 that he threw a big party for Jesus - for Jesus - and then he invited all of his buddies from his own work culture to the party. Levi did not hold a big banquet for his work buddies and then covertly invite Jesus to it— his party was specifically for Jesus, and Levi wasn't afraid to invite all of his old work buddies and acquaintances even though he knew they weren't the most shining examples of great character. In fact, we can be sure that Levi knew exactly of what sort his old friends were, he knew they were pretty rough around the edges, I'm sure he knew they weren't the most upstanding or most well-behaved individuals- In fact, I'm guessing they were a pretty loud, rowdy, and raucous bunch, and Levi wasn't ashamed or afraid to invite them to a feast in honor of Jesus. But when the Pharisees and religious people saw Jesus in the company of these loud, rowdy, and raucous bunch of sinners and thieves, they called him out and complained about it.

But here's what Jesus saw— you see, the heart behind Levi's great feast for Jesus was his invitation for his friends to come and meet Jesus. Levi knew that of all the people in his life, they were the ones who needed Jesus the most. Levi knew that Jesus would not recoil with disgust if he was made the guest of honor at a party full of sinners and thieves! Jesus saw the intent behind Levi's banquet, and his intent was perfectly in line with Jesus' mission on this earth. So Jesus told the Pharisees and religious teachers, I came for the sick, not the healthy; I didn't come to call the righteous, but I came to call sinners to repentance.

A note here about Jesus labeling the Pharisees as righteous. It's not that Jesus was admitting that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were righteous. We know from other places in the gospels that Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they were actually hypocrites, he called them snakes, and he called them blind leaders of the blind because they were unable to discern who

Jesus was when they should have been the first to recognize him. Jesus' language here is a lot like [Luke 18:19](#) where the rich ruler came to Jesus and asked, "good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus responded, "why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Now of course we know that Jesus was the only human on this planet that can truly be called good—but **Jesus was responding for effect- he was making a point from the perspective of the person he was talking to.** From the perspective of the rich young ruler in that passage, Jesus was not the Son of God, he was simply a good teacher, so Jesus responded from the ruler's perspective to show the error of his way of thinking. In the same way, from the perspective of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, they were the righteous ones, so Jesus played on their perspective by saying "I'm not here for the righteous, such as you pharisees and teachers of the law, but for these sinners who are sick and need a doctor." And I think this statement was really meant to cut at the heart of the religious leaders to show them the error of their self-understanding— to show them that their righteousness was self-made and was not of God. I think they would have recognized that Jesus was essentially telling them that their righteousness was not a God-righteousness because righteousness only comes from God and no where else. In reality, they were on the same spiritual sickness level as the sinners they were complaining about!

This is a good lesson for us, my friends. **We, as the church, need to recognize that we can never be too righteous for the sinners that Jesus calls and sends us to in this world.** Let us recognize that our righteousness only comes from our faith in Jesus, we are just as much in need of Jesus as any other sinful person in this world, no matter how great the sin. And Jesus sends us as his light to sinners in every dark culture of this world, to call out to them for repentance and to bring them into the healing presence of Jesus where there is freedom from the chains of sin. My friends, when we meet together for church, let us expect, and desire, and hope to have sinners in our church who are in need of a doctor, and let us provide them with an atmosphere of grace, love, and healing so that they can come to a place of repentance and experience the life-altering forgiveness of Jesus. And if we are all truthful with ourselves, we should all recognize that each one of us is that sinner that needs repentance and the loving grace of Christ.

One last note on this passage before I finish with one of my missionary stories. Jesus said, “I have not called the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” and **I think we often forget about those last two words... “to repentance.”** There is a growing trend in the church right now that leaves off those last two words, so the thought is that Jesus has called sinners . period. Jesus has called sinners, but what has Jesus called sinners to? He has called them to repentance. This is the reason why we exist as a church—the church is not a place where sinners congregate and encourage each other to sin more — if you find a church like that, I can guarantee it will not be a church where people are able to find healing and spiritual freedom in their life.

Our goal is to be a church where the Holy Spirit brings freedom and healing through the faith in Christ that leads to repentance. We need to be a church that finds sinners. We need to be a church that leaves everything behind to call sinners to Christ. And we also need to be a church where all of us are led to repentance through faith in Christ. **To be a church like that we need an open door, extreme patience, a ton of grace, a lot of love, and great sacrifice, but never without gentle guidance toward repentance.**

I want to finish with this story of when I was a missionary in Thailand. For a little background first— In 1998, before I was married, I left everything and moved to Thailand. I joined a ministry in Bangkok that had a dorm for new disciples, called Baan Jai Diaow, which means in Thai, the house of one heart. So I had a room in the dorm right there with the new Thai Christians, most of them students from the university across the street. We had open door worship on Tuesday nights, very loud and rowdy— along with Bible studies, small groups, and outreaches. So it was a full on discipleship ministry with the goal to give new Thai Christians a safe place to grow in their infant faith.

Well, one of the young kids named Pan that I had brought to the Lord earlier asked me to go with him to his home village in Northeast Thailand to talk to his dad. It turned out that his dad, who was divorced from his mother, had turned into a raging alcoholic, chain-smoker, a drug-addict, and a gambler—and apparently he gambled away his house and everything he owned. So I went with Pan and a couple other guys on a 5 hour bus ride up to his village to meet his dad. So we get there, and we find him living on a very dirty piece of cardboard literally outside on the porch of his friend’s house because she would understandably not let him live inside the house. There was a half-

empty bottle of alcohol, a few packs of cigarettes, and maybe a buddhist idol or two and that was about the extent of his possessions— it was a heartbreaking sight just for the sense of aimlessness and hopelessness. Well, I had my guitar with me and a Thai Bible, so we sat down next to him and sang a few worship songs. Then I shared the love of Jesus with him and asked him if he wanted to accept Jesus as his Lord and begin a new life with Christ. He said yes, so we prayed with him, gave him a Bible, we had a meal together, and we left him there and went back to Bangkok.

About a month later, he asked if he could move into the dorm with us because he wanted to learn more about being a Christian. Of course, Pan and I were overjoyed that our trip was bearing fruit, so we were able to get him the room in the dorm right next to my room, but we made it clear that he needed to participate in the discipleship activities we had at the dorm. Now, remember, he is coming into our ministry dirt poor with only the shirt on his back, and an alcoholic and drug addict with a proven inability to manage any aspect of his life. So I began spending time with him just answering any questions, reading the Bible with him, praying for him, having meals with him and often buying meals for him.

Well, I don't remember exactly how many days it was after he moved in, but not many days later, he started stumbling into my room each night absolutely intoxicated wanting me to pray for him. So I would pray for him and just spend time with him, and encouraged him to quit drinking. Then, one night around 2 in the morning he came stumbling again into my tiny little room and passed out on the hard floor right next to my bed— the heavy stench of alcohol just filled my nostrils, I couldn't really sleep — then that morning when he woke up, he asked me to pray for him - he was very regretful, and very penitent, I could see that he wanted out of this way of life but he was just struggling in it. This went on for about 8 months— there would be good weeks and really bad weeks— but he would often stumble into my room at 2 or 3 in the morning, pass out on the floor next to my bed, wreaking of alcohol, and every single morning he would ask me to forgive him and to pray for him— which I did, over and over again— did it bother me? Yeah, I'll be honest, it was driving me crazy, and I could have locked my door, but I left it open each night, and you know why? The Lord helped me to see that I was being Jesus to him. His coming into my room in that state was his way of

coming back to Jesus, it was his way of crying out for help. I felt the Lord tell me to be patient, to keep loving him, and to keep praying for him, and to keep him in the Word of God.

My friends, Jesus doesn't send us to the healthy, he sends us to the broken, the hurting, the sick, the sinners in need of an abundance of grace— **we need an open door to sinners**. Also, the Lord doesn't call us to live in an isolated bubble that encompasses only the sort of people who have reached a certain tenable standard of righteousness in our eyes. The Lord has saved us and healed us not so that we can build a church culture for only the healthy and righteous— no, **he has saved us and healed us so that we can gently draw others into that place of repentance, healing, and salvation, and that takes patience, a ton of grace, and an open door**. I think the church has become overly dependent on professional institutions— we are way too quick to refer sick people to professionals, recovery centers, addiction counselors and such, when maybe we underestimate the power of Jesus that is right here with us. In Pan's father's case, there were no recovery centers and no addiction counselors, there was only an open door, a loving community, and raw Jesus.

So, Pan's father, he is known as Paw Pan, which means "Pan's father," ended up breaking his alcohol and drug addiction in that first year of living with us, and after about 2 years, he became the dorm manager. He was so well-loved and did such a great job managing the dorm, that he ended up becoming the most beloved go-to guy for outreach teams at the YWAM Thailand national office down the street from our dorm, where he coordinated and oversaw the intake of every YWAM outreach team that came into Thailand from around the world. The turn-around was nothing short of miraculous. Now, he is the facilities manager at the YWAM training center there in Bangkok, discipling young kids and sharing the love and freedom of Christ with them.

I want to read this quote from his biography on the YWAM Thailand website. In talking about his struggles with addiction in that time after he became a Christian, he said, "I was still discouraged sometimes and worried that I would never get away from all of these addictions. But there was an incredible strength that came and helped me carry on day by day. Some days I felt I had some victories and other times I felt I was defeated but one thing I know for sure is that God gave me a new chance and a new life! God gave

me friends who loved me and helped keep me free of my many addictions. He has totally turned my life around.” and he concludes with this: “My dear brothers and sisters, [John 11:40](#) says, Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the Glory of God?". Now I pray that the Holy Spirit and the Power of Jesus Christ and the Love of our God will be with you wherever you are to help you take His message of Hope to everyone! God bless you and thanks for your prayers!”

I’m going to use that last sentence for the benediction this morning.

Let’s pray.