

Jesus Came to Call the Sick

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

- Luke 5:31,32 -

My son Andrew is six years old and the one thing that he likes to do is imitate me. When I’m rocking out on my guitar, he takes his Wiggles guitar and does the same. I’m thrilled to see my cute little boy imitate me but I’m also convicted because Andrew reveals my imperfect nature. For example, at school Andrew writes what’s called a daily topic. On several of his daily topics Andrew wrote, “Today is Monday January 5th and we forgot to study the Bible on Saturday.” It was true. I said we would but I got lazy and didn’t. What this tells me is that as much as I try to be a good father, I am not a perfect example for my son. As long as he follows me, he will learn both the good and the bad. The reality is that as he becomes older, he will follow his teachers, his friends, his wife, his boss, his interests and his hopes. But none of them will be perfect and all of them will impart something that is negative. So what can he do? What is perfect? What is worth following? This passage teaches us the answer - I hope by the time we are finished, the answer will be perfectly clear to all of us.

As Jesus was walking along, he came across a tax collector named Levi. If you don’t know much about tax collectors during the time of Jesus, here’s a little background. Tax collectors were agents of the Roman government charged with the mission to collect taxes from the people. But these tax collectors were also crooks that extorted more than what they were required. They would use the threat of imprisonment to squeeze the last dollar out of the already poor people so as to make themselves rich. People called them traitors and refused to be associated with them. They were publicly hated sinners that no one wanted to be friends with.

When Jesus came up to Levi the tax collector, Jesus simply said to him, “Follow me.” Upon hearing these words, something remarkable happened. Verse 28 says, “and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.” What Levi left behind was his job, his source of income and his identity. What Levi left behind was the culmination of everything that he had worked for his entire life and also the bitter reason why his own countrymen hated him so much. Levi leaving everything behind is equivalent to me quitting my job with no other job waiting. It’s like a doctor ceasing to practice medicine or a rock star who quits in the middle of a world tour, leaving behind the money, the adoration of fans and all the luxuries and privileges that comes with being a rock star.

But nevertheless, Levi left everything behind and so the big question is why. No doubt Levi probably heard about Jesus through the grapevine. Perhaps Levi was interested in knowing who Jesus was and what he was about. He would have heard about the miracles and Jesus’ incredible teachings. We don’t know what he thought but we do know how it made him feel. Verse 29 says, “Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.” Following Jesus made Levi so good that he decided to throw a huge party for Jesus and all his tax collector friends. At this party Levi announced his retirement from the IRS and his new career as a homeless wanderer following Jesus. Maybe his tax collector

buddies thought he was crazy. But Levi didn't care - he just wanted to express his joy in following Jesus.

At this point, I think it is good to take a step back and spend a little time talking about what it means to follow someone - or something. Before Levi chose to follow Jesus, Levi followed money. He followed the money all the way to the point of robbing his own people for it. Levi sacrificed his time, his integrity, and even his own countrymen to follow money. Perhaps he sacrificed marriage, family and ultimately his own happiness to follow money. There is a term that describes this intense, sacrificial and devoted following of someone or something - worship. In some ways, worship and following are synonymous. To worship is to give up your time, to devote all your energy and sacrifice everything else for the cause of our object of worship - very much like the way Levi followed money.

So in effect, what Levi did was worshipping money - money became his god and he was the chief priest. So worshipping is not limited to a god but it also extends to people, objects, places, relationships and so on. Some people worship power, some people worship sex. Other people are followers of the various "ism's" of the world - Pluralism, Humanism, Sectarianism, Synchrotism, Modernism, Post-modernism, etc. Still more are the "ist's" - fundamentalists, environmentalists, liberalists, traditionalists, atheists and so on. In the more everyday sense, some people follow friends, children, ideas, dreams, hopes, husbands, wives, a house, a job, the weather or even food. All of these things are things that we can follow and we can follow them with intense passion, we can sacrifice our time and energy for them and be willing to do anything to get more of them.

I'll give you an example. I know of a mom in my son's school who volunteers EVERYDAY. Now, it's great to see a parent take an interest in her child's education. But this woman has given up all her free time, chance to do other things and decided to offer it all as a sacrifice for the sake of her child. I don't mean to promote neglect and it's good that she wants to be involved in her son's education. But this is also a form of worship - this is following something, leaving everything behind. I think all of us in this room are all guilty of such following, of such worship of something. Then where does following these things lead us? What does worshipping money, a husband or a wife, or a boyfriend or girlfriend get us? If you look at Levi's example, you'll see that it led him nowhere. It led him to no joy, no peace, no fulfillment, no love, no pleasure and above all, no reciprocation. Levi's money didn't love him back. Levi's fat bank account did not say, "Levi, we love you - thank you for stealing us from your own people." All it got Levi was the despise of his own people. The same is true for us. I love my children, I love my wife and I love the people in this church. But the fact is that one day, my children will leave to start their own lives. There will be times when I feel disappointed because my wife couldn't love me the way I wanted her to love me. And we will all at some point disappoint each other. Our money will stop making us happy, sex and physical pleasure will become a burden and cause wounds in our souls. Friends will betray each other and jobs will lay you off. Eventually, everything we worship and follow will fail us. Why? Because none of them are perfect, none of them is everlasting and because none of them is Jesus.

The problem is that when we start following something, we do it with the assumption that it is going to give something back to us. It seems that those things are promising us something good, something we want, something that we need. But the truth is that they don't - it is all a lie perpetuated by the devil. The devil lies to you and puts false truths in things so that people will follow those rather than Jesus. The real truth is that only Jesus is worthy of our worship, only Jesus is worth following. Look at Levi - he threw a huge party to thank Jesus and celebrate his new life with his friends. Only Jesus could incite such rejoice, such change, such joy and desire to celebrate. Obama talks about change but if that change does not involve Jesus, it's pointless.

So what makes Jesus worthy of following?

First, Jesus is the only God that came to the world.

In verse 29, it says that Levi threw a banquet - a huge party - for Jesus at his house. Levi threw this party in Jesus' honor. This meant that Jesus was there, eating, drinking, laughing and having a good time with tax collectors and other sinners. Jesus didn't hang out with the religious elite or the socially respectable people. Jesus hung out with tax collectors, fishermen, rebels, prostitutes, Samaritans and all kinds of ordinary folk with ordinary lives. Jesus loved little children and Jesus healed lepers. Jesus taught to commoners and the illiterate. Jesus cared for widows and those that could not help themselves. He had no home of his own and so he stayed with anyone who would open their home to him - the ordinary, sinful people who wanted to show their love for Jesus.

Jesus never drove anyone away for being too poor, too dumb, too young, too old, too rich or too sinful. Jesus made himself available to all people - even from birth when he was born in a feed box of farm animals, Jesus epitomized humility. But the crazy thing is that despite all this, Jesus was God. He was the creator of the heavens and the earth. Jesus breathed into existence the sun and the moon. Jesus spoke and the waters moved and the earth was revealed. Jesus rebuked the winds and it obeyed. Jesus walked on water and he raised the dead. Jesus healed the terminally ill and Jesus drove out evil spirits. Jesus was God, Jesus came from heaven leaving the Great White Throne where angels sang his praises, "Holy, Holy, Holy". Jesus left the place where he was honored, worshipped by angels and loved perfectly by the Perfect God the Father and God the Spirit. Isaiah chapter 6 says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'"

This Jesus, this glorious, powerful, almighty and unimaginable Holy Jesus, came to this world. The world that you and I live in - this cesspool of sin, depravity, ugliness and condemnation. Jesus gave up heavenly food to eat as a peasant. Jesus gave up his heavenly bed to lay his head on rocks. Jesus decided to be fully human, to feel pain, to feel loneliness, to feel sadness and disappointments. Jesus got hungry, he got tired, he got dirty and he got smelly, just like all of us humans. In every way but one, Jesus was just like us. Why? So that he can be our friend, our guide, our shepherd and our Savior. By coming to us and living among us, Jesus, the Almighty God could say, "I understand your pain, I've felt it. I've cried tears and I've had broken hearts. I've been hungry and

I've been in need. I've felt loneliness and I've suffered. And I've chosen to experience all these things so you can come to me, unload your burdens and follow me for I understand and I will carry the burdens for you." No other god in any other religion preaches this message. No other god - be it things or idols - comes to our level and leads us out of our predicament.

Every other god stays as far away as possible and only shows wrath when we do wrong. The money god demands our absolute attention and devotion, otherwise it dies and disappears. The girlfriend god demands us to read her mind and be the perfect man. Otherwise she leaves us for another that is more perfect. The husband god demands us to be impeccable in every way otherwise it does not love back. But Jesus, the Almighty God requires nothing from us but to simply follow him. And not only this, he came to us - he didn't demand us to find him - he found us and showed us through His examples the way to salvation. Though we are disgusting, covered in our own muck of sin, Jesus came to us, cleansed us with His blood and God credited it to us as righteousness. We could do no right, we could do nothing to save ourselves, but Jesus came to us, broke bread with us, shared a cup with us, laughed and cried with us. He even told jokes and gave us funny stories so we could relate to him, identify with him and see ourselves perfected in Him so that we may follow him and be saved.

Second, Jesus is perfect.

All our imagined and idolized gods are imperfect for we find faults in them. But Jesus is perfect. He is the perfect God and while he was on earth, he was the perfect man. Though he lived among us and lived as we lived, he committed no sin neither in deed nor in thought. He was the perfect example of what to do and what not to do. Jesus was the perfect example of how to love, how to serve, how to suffer, how to die and how to live. He perfected where Adam failed and he perfected where we failed. He lived the perfect life, he taught the perfect truth, and he died the perfect death so that in our place, he could fulfill perfection demanded by the law and so we might be made perfect through him. Jesus never disappoints, Jesus always loves. Jesus' compassion never runs out nor is it ever conditional. Jesus always provides, always embraces, always encourages and always supports. Unlike the idols we worship, Jesus has perfect power to change us, to convict us and to give us hope. Jesus has perfect authority to drive out the demons that torment us and to give us a new, regenerate heart that wants to worship God rather than created things. There is nothing false, wicked or lacking about Jesus. Whatever it is that we need, long for and desire, the perfect manifestation of these things is found in Jesus. It's hard to imagine the depth of his perfection. I love my wife more than I love anyone in the world. There is nothing I wouldn't do for my wife. The same is true for my children. I'll work 28 hours a day, 15 days a week and 2000 days a year if that was what it took for me to serve and take care of them. But to think, that compared to how Jesus loves my wife, my children and me, my love for my family is like the love from one cockroach to another. I am an imperfect man whose love, example and dedication is equally imperfect. But Jesus is perfect in every way possible.

When the Pharisees saw the party going on in this tax collector's house, they looked in from a distance and saw, gasp, Jesus! Jesus was singing, eating and having a good old time with "sinners"! They became indignant - probably because they never got invited to parties - and asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" The

Pharisees were the anti-Jesus type of people. They were everything that Jesus was not. They were self righteous, hypocritical, unloving, uncompassionate, impatient and religious “perfectionists”. They ruthlessly criticized those who needed God the most. They cared only for the laws and traditions and cared little about what the Scriptures were actually teaching. They judged people based on how they obeyed the law and made themselves the standard of what is righteous. They got so narrow minded and so consumed by their own morality and self worth that they could not recognize the Messiah who was fulfilling the prophecies of their own biblical heroes.

When Jesus heard this, he replied, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Here Jesus teaches that there are two kinds of people- the righteous and the sick. Those who are righteous do not need Jesus but to those who are sick, Jesus came to heal. How does Jesus heal? Through repentance. When we repent, Jesus gives us a new heart, a new heart that is no longer diseased by our sinful past but a healthy new one that is soft and conformable, ready for God to shape. Repentance begets a new heart and repentance is the way Jesus heals us.

But the problem is that we tend to think that we are not sick and thus we consider ourselves righteous. People tend to put themselves over others and judge others. The popular culture dictates that we should not judge - the common response from non-Christians towards Christians is, “You can’t judge me!” But what about us Christians? Are we any better than non-Christians? In some ways, I think we are even worse. We are often times just like the Pharisees and you know what Jesus called the Pharisees? “A brood of vipers, white washed tomb and sons of the devil.” You probably don’t want to hear that we as Christians are so depraved but let me ask you this. How many times have we refused to sit next to someone whom you thought was too sinful looking - the heavily pierced, pink hair, spikes around their neck, tattoos everywhere, chain smoking drunkard - that guy. How many of us have said about other people things like, “Why do you dress the way you do? Why do you talk the way you talk? Why do you eat or not eat certain things? Why don’t you write testimonies? Why is your testimony so short? Why is it so long? Why do you sing old songs? Why do you sing loud songs? Why aren’t you like me? I know better, I am more spiritual, I am more religious, I’ve read the Bible more than you and I’ve been a Christian longer than you and so you must listen to me. Otherwise, something must be wrong with you.” Did Jesus say these things to Levi? Did Jesus start a barrage of condemnations to Levi? He alone would be justified but he didn’t. When we judge people - even for supposed spiritual reasons - we are holding ourselves as the standard and thus judging others based on our false, imperfect nature. There is nothing more destructive than a religious traditionalist insisting an unbeliever or even a young Christians to be just like him.

I don’t think anyone of us here makes a conscious decision to hold ourselves as the standard of perfection. I don’t think any of us think that we are as good as Jesus. But it becomes so easy to be entrenched in our religious activities and traditions that anything outside of it seems wrong. It is so easy to become engrossed in our way of doing things that someone who does it differently seems wrong. But this is pride and spiritual arrogance. Jesus didn’t act like this. Jesus became the friend of sinners. He associated and loved all kinds of sinners. Jesus accepted the love of Mary Magdalene who doused

him with perfume. Jesus accepted the love of a poor woman who could only give 2 copper coins. Jesus accepted the repentance of a hardened criminal dying on the cross. Jesus accepts worship from all people of all nations. Jesus accepts men, women, black, white, gay, straight, the pierced, the tattooed, democrats and republicans. He accepts worship through classical music, rock'n'roll, hip hop and even boy bands. Jesus invites all kinds of people to follow him - including the Baptists, Methodists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Jehovah's witnesses, Mormons and even Rod Blagojavich. Jesus became a man so he could become all things to all people. So if Jesus invited all these different kinds of people and Jesus accepts worship by people of all cultures and styles, then who are we to judge that some methods of worship are not acceptable? Who are we to say that others should follow Jesus my way? Isn't this nothing but religious pride? Isn't this nothing but arrogance? We cannot and must not try to mold people into our image. If we subscribe to such ideas, we really need to repent. Paul wrote, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." Our life and attitude ought to reflect this. We can't be religious people bent on our way of doing things but become everything to everyone so that we can help as many as possible to follow Jesus.

Among us, some are like Levi - neck deep in our own selfishness, greed and pride. And, like Levi, we suffer from the tremendous burdens such a character imposes on us - loneliness, anxiety, fear and doubt. Some of us are like the Pharisees - arrogant, self righteous, proud and completely fooled by our own sense of self worth. We judge and demand that others measure up to my standard, my church's standard, my traditions and my way of doing things. As a result, we suffer what the Pharisees suffered - envy, frustration, restlessness, fruitlessness and anxiety. Some of us are somewhere in between - we are the other sinners in Levi's banquet and we are the ordinary folks walking around outside. The breadth of our shortcomings range far and wide. Some are full of worries while others are overwhelmed with anxiety. Some ponder the purpose of our existence and others are completely blind to their destructive lifestyles. No matter where we fit in this web of human deficiencies and sin derived sufferings, our only hope is to follow Jesus. Jesus knows all our sorrows, all our fears. Jesus knows how blind we are and how much we long to know the truth. Jesus understands our desire for the truth and freedom from what paralyses us. Jesus knows what we need and he is willing to give it to us. Jesus walks with us, carries us and holds our hand to guide us. Jesus eats with us and drinks with us, he laughs and cries with us just so that he can be completely accessible and completely humble to accept any and every man who seeks to know him. And yet, unlike us, Jesus was perfect and he lived a sinless life to be our example and shepherd. Jesus encourages us to be blameless just as God is blameless. Only through following Jesus could Levi change and only Jesus was good enough for Levi to leave everything behind. If you want to find what Levi found. If you want to celebrate and be joyful like Levi was, I invite us all to follow Jesus, worship Jesus and leave all our baggage behind.