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Luke 5:1-11, 27-32

There was a time when we would wonder what became of the people we grew up with. Thanks to Facebook, we often have a peek into how things unfolded. When you think about people you knew in your youth, are you surprised at how they “turned out” as an adult? Are others surprised at how YOU turned out?

One of the key points of today’s text in Luke 5 is the fact that God transforms and uses sinners to do His work. Often those He uses seem to be the most unlikely candidates in the eyes of other people or even in the eyes of the person he uses.

One very dramatic example of this is Pastor Johnny Hunt going from poolroom hustler and high school dropout to the champion of the Great Commission. In my own case, though I was fairly tame as a teen, some of my friends would be surprised to log on today and find me teaching verse by verse through Luke!

Big Idea: God transforms and uses ordinary people in His work, often seemingly the most unlikely people. Realizing how sinful we are is the first requirement for Him to change us into the person He can use as a disciple.

Before the text, some context: Jesus had been healing and teaching in Capernaum and throughout Galilee. Now he began to select and train His inner circle of disciples. His choices were interesting and no doubt shocking to some. Rather than choose the most “religious” people as His inner circle, He goes to the ordinary and seemingly sinful of society. That was no accident. As history unfolds in the New Testament we learn that smelly fishermen and dirty sinners make the best disciples. In Luke 5 we find Jesus teaching by the Sea of Galilee.

Luke 5:3–11 (ESV)

³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people

from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

- Next, Jesus healed two men, defended His authority as God’s son to forgive sin, then approached another unlikely candidate for discipleship.

Luke 5:27–32 (ESV)

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” ²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. ²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

- There is some disagreement among scholars on just when Jesus first became acquainted with Simon Peter, James, and John. There is a good chance that they were already engaged with His ministry before this event.
- So people could hear, Jesus asked Simon to use his boat as a pulpit.
- The fishermen were washing and mending their nets.

- Jesus finished teaching and the real sermon was about to unfold.
- His command to “put out into the deep” and “let down the nets” would have been illogical. Why would experienced fishermen take fishing advice from a carpenter? Everyone knew fish in the Sea of Galilee were caught at night in the shallows not in the heat of the day in the deep water.
- In typical fashion, Simon protested they had “toiled” all night with no catch.
- It wasn’t much of a protest. Clearly Simon respected this teacher Jesus (“master”) so against his years of fishing experience he gave in.
- Simon’s reply should be underlined in our Bibles: *“But at your word I will let down the nets.”* It made no sense but Peter was moved to obey.
- We’re reminded of Mary at the wedding in Cana the scene of Jesus’ first miracle. She told the servers: *“Do whatever he tells you.”*ⁱ
- A truth: The commands of Jesus often defy human logic but they demand immediate obedience. Our response should be: *“...at your word I WILL.”*
- We see several things in the incredible catch of fish.
- First, understand the size of these boats. These were likely 30 feet long. These were not bass boats but industrial fishing boats and nets. A catch that would cause them to begin to sink and tear was enormous.
- After a night of no catches and in daytime deep water this was miraculous!
- Did Jesus perform this miracle to give these fishermen a financial windfall before they “left everything” to follow Him. Perhaps, but we don’t know.
- We DO know the effect this miracle had on the men He was calling.
- The crowd was amazed but Simon had a deeper reaction: *“...he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*ⁱⁱ
- Peter’s reaction reminds us of the Prophet Isaiah’s conversion experience. Isaiah exclaimed: *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of*

unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah was sure he was about to die!

- Some people reject Jesus thinking they are good enough. Some reject him because they think they are NOT good enough. The good news of Romans 3:10 is no one is “righteous!” Realizing our sinful state is the first step to repentance (sorrow and change) and forgiveness from God.
- Darrel Bock writes: *“What Peter does not realize is that admitting one’s inability and sin is the best prerequisite for service, since then one can depend on God. Peter’s confession becomes his résumé for service. Humility is the elevator to spiritual greatness. So Jesus replies by telling Peter not to fear. It is one thing to be a sinner and deny it. It is another to know who you are before God and humbly bow before him.”^{iv}*
- That quote applies to both the unsaved that need Christ and the saved who have trusted Him as Lord. Often believers fear their conversion wasn’t real. One of the signs of real salvation is conviction when we sin.
- Now that we’ve established that Jesus uses repentant sinners, He gives them their commission as disciples: *“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.^v*
- A couple of miracles and a debate with the Pharisees later, Jesus called His next unlikely disciple. Not a smelly fisherman but a dirty tax collector.
- Tax collectors sat in a tollbooth and collected surtax for the Roman Empire on goods that came through. Since the tax laws were vague it was easy for tax collectors to rip people off and pocketing the difference.
- There is no evidence that Levi (Matthew) was a thief but in the eyes of other Jews any tax collector was a sinner based on the job itself.
- Note that Jesus went directly to Levi seeking him out intentionally.
- Quoting Darrel Bock again: *“Jesus reaches out to sinners because he sees the potential for their being renewed through God’s grace. Jesus knows such change does not happen when those who seek sinners isolate themselves. His mission is to*

regain the lost by going to them, as he does here with Levi.^{vi} Choosing a tax collector was controversial.

- Levi (Matthew) was so overjoyed at his salvation he threw a “great feast” to introduce his “sinner” friends to Jesus. What a great evangelism tactic!
- The self-righteous religious leaders weren’t impressed but offended. In cowardly fashion they didn’t challenge Jesus but complained to His new disciples: *“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”*
- What a scandal in the eyes of these religious separatists who isolated themselves from such low life -- Jesus was partying with sinners!
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary: *“Not only was Jesus associating with people to whom the Pharisees objected, but He also was eating and drinking with them. Eating and drinking with others denotes a fellowship or camaraderie with them.”*^{vii}
- Knowing their complaint, Jesus responded to their superior attitude: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*^{viii}
- There is no record of a retort from the Pharisees and scribes. What could they say? As He did many times, Jesus shut them down with the truth.
- Warren Wiersbe: *“The scribes and Pharisees saw Matthew and his friends as condemned sinners, but Jesus saw them as spiritually sick “patients” who needed the help of a physician...Sin is like a disease: it starts in a small and hidden way; it grows secretly; it saps our strength; and if it is not cured, it kills.”*^{ix}
- Look at the contrast between the scribes and Pharisees and Simon Peter.
- When Jesus referred to the “healthy,” the hypocrites said, *“That’s us!”*
- They were in “unhealthy” denial of the fact that they too were sinners.
- When Simon saw Jesus’ power he confessed to being “sick” with sin.
- Jesus came to “heal” those who acknowledge their “sin-sick” condition.

- The fact that Jesus was “dining” with “sinners” has another lesson for us.
- What can we learn about how to “mix” with the unsaved like Jesus did?
- Do you have a tendency to “distance” or isolate from the “sin-sick?”
- If we’re God’s “medical assistants” for reaching sinners we can’t isolate, so what kind of “personal protective equipment” should we use?
- Quoting Darrell Bock again: *“Concern for appropriate separation is important, but texts like Ephesians 5:7–14 help to sort out how proper separation works. We must separate ourselves from the “deeds of darkness,” from the acts of sin, but we must not isolate ourselves from sinners...Jesus himself had table fellowship with sinners, an important method of relating in ancient culture...One danger of piety is the danger of separatism. An excessive form of separatism, such as the Pharisees called for, can kill mission.”*^x
- In practical terms, Jesus teaches us we can have contact with unsaved people without “moral compromise.” Deciding how and where to spend time with the unsaved will require the guidance of God’s word and praying for direction of His Holy Spirit in how we can “fellowship” with sinners without endorsing or participating in their sin.
- For example: If my friend goes to strip clubs I would have him over for dinner but I wouldn’t go to the strip club with him. Would I go to a party at his house? It depends on what will be happening at the party.
- Though there are no simple “rules of engagement,” Tom Carter gives us some common-sense points for a Christ-follower to consider:
“Since Jesus [had dinner with/partied with/hung out with] sinners in the places where they congregated, we should do so too when: (1) they are not engaging in sin, (2) we do so for the purpose of calling them to repentance, (3) when our presence does not condone sin or the mocking of God, and/or (4) when the sinners are not our fellow believers.”^{xi}

- That last point comes from 1 Cor. 5:11 where Paul warned believers not to associate with other believers who were practicing some specific sins.
- What we know for certain from this passage is that Jesus didn't shun or distance Himself from sinners. Instead He met them with love and compassion where they were without compromising His message.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Smelly fishermen and dirty sinners make the best disciples.
- God transforms and uses ordinary and often seemingly, unlikely people.
- Peter said, *"I'm so sinful Lord I don't deserve to be in your presence!"*
- Peter was correct but Jesus died to remove the "distance" caused by sin so we can enjoy a close, personal relationship with Him.
- Realizing how sinful we are is the first step for Him to change us into the person He can use as a disciple.
- Trusting Christ as Savior and Lord qualifies us to be His disciples. We don't have to achieve enough righteousness of our own to serve Him and share Him with others because He has covered us with His righteousness.
- How can we appropriately relate to the unsaved like Jesus did?
- Jesus teaches us in this text that we can have relationship with unsaved people without "moral compromise."
- This week let's thank Him that He uses people like us and make an effort to relate to those who don't yet know Him.

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 2:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 5:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Is 6:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{iv} Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 155). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^v [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 5:10–11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{vi} Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 160). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{vii} Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 218). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{viii} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 5:31–32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{ix} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 188). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^x Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 163). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{xi} <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/since-jesus-ate-with-sinners-do-i-have-to-eat-at-the-strip-clubs-buffet/>