



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.
1286-11
Luke 5:1-32
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February 20, 2005

I Need a Good Doctor!

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

On one occasion a friend asked St. Francis, "Why you? Why does everybody come to you? You're not well educated or from a noble family." St. Francis said, "It is because God could find none among sinners any smaller, nor any more insignificant and sinful, therefore he has chosen me to accomplish his marvelous work."

I know that that sounds really good. It sounds so spiritual, like a real Christian thing to say. The kind of thing a saint would say. But what if it was true? What if it was true of each of us? What if it was true that God doesn't call us in spite of our sin, but because of our sin? What if I told you that the thing that really qualifies us to belong to him and to be used by him is not our worthiness but our unworthiness?

We're studying the gospel of Luke. Jesus has begun his ministry in Galilee. We've seen him teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath. In Nazareth his hometown friends got so upset with him that they tried to throw him off a cliff. In Capernaum he had a warmer reception. He cast out demons and healed many of various diseases. Crowds flocked around him. One of the questions that arises in chapter 5 is exactly what did Jesus come to do. Did he come to just heal people? What about the deeper issues? He could cast out demons, but could he cast out selfishness? He could make a lame man walk, but could he make him love?

In chapter 5 Jesus encounters four different people. Each one of these encounters is worthy of a sermon by itself, but I want to take them all together because there is a common thread that runs through each story that I don't want you to miss. The first and the last story describe how Jesus called two of his disciples to follow him and join him in his work. In-between there are two stories of healings. Two calls; two healings.

I. Jesus calls a sinful fisherman.

In the first encounter Jesus calls Simon to follow him. This is not their first encounter. Simon has already taken his first steps in following Jesus. Jesus has already healed his mother-in-law. But this would turn out to be a decisive day for Simon.

"Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And

He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat" (Luke 5:1-3).

Jesus is teaching by the lake and the crowds are pressing around him. There are a couple of empty boats lying on the edge of the lake and Jesus climbs into one of them—Simon's. He's sitting there with his partners: his brother, Andrew, and James and John. These are not weekend fisherman with light rods out for a lazy day on the lake. These are commercial fisherman. They've been doing backbreaking work all night. At dawn they beached their boats, ate breakfast, and under the warming sun began the tedious work of washing, mending and drying their nets. Once dry they would be folded and placed back in the boats for the coming night. I'm sure that when Jesus stepped into Simon's boat as a floating pulpit he took notice. "Hey look! The preacher's in my boat!" But I don't think he was prepared for what happened next.

"When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets'" (vv. 4-5).

You have to wonder if Jesus knew what he was asking. He's asking a man who had worked all night to re-launch his boat, load a thousand pounds of wet nets, row out into deep water, and lower his nets—all in the middle of the day, which was the world's worst time to fish! And what right did a carpenter have to tell an expert fisherman how run his business? He wanted to say, "You stick to preaching, I'll do the fishing!"

A few years back I was coaching my seven-year-old son's farm league baseball team. It was a league where the coach pitched to the kids. I was pitching but I was having some trouble getting the ball over the plate. So the one of the coaches from the other team came out to replace me. He came out to the mound and I began to give him a few pointers about how fast to pitch and how close to get to the boys. He wasn't very receptive to my advice. What I didn't realize at the time is that I was offering my expert advise to a guy named Dave Righetti, who happens to be the pitching coach for the San Francisco Giants!

That must have been how Simon felt when Jesus tells him how to fish! Simon puts up a mild protest, but

he's seen Jesus do enough wild stuff that he's willing to go along. Look what happens next.

“When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink” (vv. 6–7).

Fisherman have a little saying, “May all your fishes come true.” Well, here, all Simon's fishes had come true! He and his friends haul in a record catch of fish that threatens to sink two boats that were 27 feet long. This was raw power; a massive nature miracle. What do you do with that if you're Simon? Look at v. 8.

“But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.’ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him” (vv. 8–11).

This is the last time he's called Simon Peter. From now on he's Peter—the rock. But he didn't start out as a rock; he started out as a marshmallow. He's traumatized by the power and holiness of Jesus. He'd seen it before, but never in his own personal domain, and that's what blew him away. Peter knew he was in the presence of holy power. And with that came deep awareness of his own sinfulness. He felt both unworthy and unsafe in his presence. And so he says, “Depart from me, Lord.” But Jesus doesn't depart. Instead, he gives him a new calling, “Don't fear, from now on you'll be catching men” And that's what he would do. In Acts, after Peter preached his first sermon, 3,000 souls were netted for the Kingdom. That's a lot of fish! Enough to sink a church!

But it's almost as if Peter wasn't ready to be used by the Master until he came to that crisis of realizing his own sinfulness. He wasn't the first or last person to experience that. When Isaiah had a vision of the Lord seated on his throne his first thought was not adoration but fear: **“Woe is me,”** he cried (Is.6:5). Job had the same experience:

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6)

John wrote in Revelation,

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead” (Rev.1:17).

It's almost as if the thing that really qualifies Simon to be used by Jesus is not his worthiness but his unworthiness. Three years later, Peter would relearn this. After he denied Jesus three times, in sorrow and remorse he went back to this very beach to fish. He and his friends fished all night and didn't catch a thing. Early in the morning, the risen Jesus stood on the shore. They didn't know who he was. He called out, “Did you catch any fish?” “No,” they answered from the boat. He said, “Throw your nets down on the other side and you'll find some.” After they did they were unable to haul the net in because of the size of the catch. Then John said to Peter, “It's the Lord!” Do you know what Peter did this time? He didn't say, “Depart from me, Lord, for I have denied you three times.” NO! He jumped into the water and swam to Jesus. You see, Peter knew that his sin was not a reason to run from Jesus but to run to Jesus. Why? Because he and only he has made a sacrifice for our sins. Only he can forgive sin. Only he can put a life back together that's been broken by sin. Do you know that? If you do, then run to him!

II. Jesus cleanses a leper.

The second story is a healing story. It's the story of an encounter Jesus had with a leper.

“While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him. And He ordered him to tell no one, ‘But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses” (vv. 12–15).

Here is a man who comes to Jesus. He's desperate. Dr. Luke says he was “full of leprosy.” In other words, the disease had run its course. We don't need a detailed description, but the man's appearance was loathsome. In Israel the lot of the leper is summed up in Lev. 13:45-46, **“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkept, cover the lower part of his face, crying out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’”** Lepers lived alone, ostracized from society. Rabbis in Jesus' day taught that it was illegal to even greet a leper. They had to remain at least 100 cubits away if they were upwind, and four cubits if downwind. Josephus said that lepers were treated “as if they were...dead men.”

So this man broke all the rules when he approached Jesus. Just like Peter did, he falls down on his face before Jesus. He has a deep awareness of his own need. He knows he's unclean. He knows there's nothing he can do to help himself. He's in the advanced stages of

leprosy. He's a hopeless case. But he has faith: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." He doesn't doubt the Lord's ability to cleanse him. In those days it was believed that curing a leper was as hard to do as raising the dead. But he believes Jesus can do it. What he's not sure of is the Lord's willingness to do it. I used to see this as evidence that his faith was lacking. Now I think he just realized that he didn't have the right to call the shots. The Lord has the right to choose to NOT heal as well as to heal. So he doesn't presume to know what the Lord wants to do. But the Lord is so willing, and he shows that by touching him and becoming unclean himself, and cleansing him.

Throughout Scripture, leprosy is symbolic of sin. R.C. Trench, a great Greek scholar wrote that though the leper was not more sinful than anyone else, he was "an outward and visible sign of innermost spiritual corruption." This is what we are: unclean. Just as he was full of leprosy, so we're full of sin. Sin controls people through two opposing lies. The first is denial: "I'm not a sinner. I'm not that bad. Nothing is really wrong with me." The second is despair: "I'm a sinner and there is no hope for me at all. I'm beyond help." That's a lie, too. This leper doesn't deny his sin, but he doesn't allow it to keep him from coming to Jesus either. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite; it drove him to Jesus. The thing that really qualified him to be touched by Jesus wasn't his worthiness but his unworthiness. It's the same with us. We have to know our need, and we have to come to him. If we do, Jesus will deal with us just as he did with him. He touches us. The touch of Christ's pure hand on the rotting flesh of the leper is a parable of how Jesus identified with us by becoming a man. He laid hold of our flesh. He also cleanses us. On the cross, he became unclean with our sin, and in doing so, he cleansed us.

III. Jesus heals a paralytic as proof of his authority to forgive sin.

The third encounter is another healing story. Once again Jesus is teaching. But this time Luke tells us that some of the religious "bigwigs" were there not only from Galilee but from Judea and even Jerusalem. They're there as kind of an investigative committee. Luke says in v.17 they were "sitting there" watching. The curious populace squeezed around them. Suddenly, in the midst of that charged atmosphere, there was a noise from above.

"And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus" (vv. 18–19).

These guys want to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. They can't get through the crowd so they walk up the stairway on the side of the house and step onto the flat

roof. They pull off the tiles, dig through about a foot of dirt and lower their friend down right in front of Jesus. Imagine watching all of this from below! First, you hear someone up on the roof. Then you think you hear someone digging through the roof. Then debris begins to fall on you and you see a little crack of light which gets bigger and bigger until it's widened to the size of a man. You look up and see four wide-eyed, sweaty and determined faces peering down. Then one of them issues a warning and little by little a lame man on a bed is lowered on ropes like a first century Otis elevator. I can just hear them: "a little to the left; a little to the right; okay let it down easy."

Finally, he's right in front of Jesus. How excited these guys must have been as they looked down from the roof. In v. 17 Luke says

"the power of the Lord was present for (Jesus) to perform healing."

They knew it and they couldn't wait for that power to be unleashed on their friend. They're just like the leper. They believe that Jesus had the power to heal; that he's the only hope for their friend. And they're willing to overcome significant obstacles to get to Jesus, just as the leper was. Their faith was determined. But look what happens next.

"Seeing their faith, He said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (v. 20).

What a strange thing to say! These guys have gone to all this trouble, they had a great plan, and then Jesus says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." That's not exactly what they had in mind. I can just see the men on the roof look at each other, "WHAT did he say?" "He said his sins are forgiven." "Oh, nice! That's great. He could have shouted that out the window. So now we have to lift him back up through this hole?"

In v. 21 the focus shifts. Luke centers in on the scribes who he says were sitting there thinking, "He can't do that. Only God can forgive sins. He's making himself out to be equal with God!" In certain respects they're right. Only God CAN forgive sins.

Why DID Jesus say this? First, Jesus pronounced forgiveness first so he could confront his critics with the implications of the healing he was about to perform. Look at vv. 22–23.

"But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, 'Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'"

Which IS easier to say? It's easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" because anyone can say it but there is no way of knowing if they have the authority to do. But if someone says to a paralytic, "Get up and walk," we know immediately whether they're for real. If the man gets up, he's the real deal. So in v.24 Jesus says in

essence, “I’ll do the harder thing so you know I have the authority to do the easier thing. I’ll heal the man so you know I have the authority to forgive the man.” With that he commands the paralytic to rise, take up his mat, and go home. And that’s just what he does.

The second reason Jesus pronounced forgiveness first is because even though the man was paralyzed, Jesus knew he had an even deeper need. What was it? He needed forgiveness. He saw beneath the surface to the greater need. What good would it do for him to be able to walk but spend eternity without Christ? Jesus met his greatest need first. Verse 25 says the man walked home “glorifying God.” Let me ask you: Why was he so happy? Why did he glorify God? Because he could walk, or because the burden of sin had been lifted off his back? What would make you happier? I hear people say all the time, “Well, your health is really the most important thing.” But is it really? What does it profit a person if he gains perfect health but loses his soul? And what will a man give in exchange for his soul? I guess it really depends, doesn’t it. If you know your sin; if you are conscious of how unworthy you are; if you feel the dreadful consequences of sin in your relationship with God and others, then nothing will be more important than forgiveness. But if your sin really is no big deal, if you really don’t feel like you need forgiveness, then perhaps your health will be the most important thing.

IV. Jesus calls a sinful tax collector to follow him.

Are you starting to see the thread that runs through these stories? One last story. This one is about another call.

“After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him” (vv. 27–28).

Tax collectors were about the worst scoundrels of all in Jesus’ day. Many of them were wealthy Jews who had sold out to the Romans. They made their money by extortion. They were the most hated men in Hebrew society. They were not allowed to serve in court as witnesses. They were excommunicated from the synagogue. But out of the blue Jesus call this tax collector to follow him. And he does! Just like Peter, Levi, later to be named Matthew, drops everything and follows Jesus.

But he doesn’t just follow Jesus. He throws a party for him. Look at v. 29.

“And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them.”

New believers are almost always the most effective evangelists. Why? Because they haven’t been

“Christianized.” They haven’t been a Christian long enough to have made Christians their only social group. Instead, they do everything they can to introduce their old friends to Jesus! That’s what Levi is doing. He’s so excited about his relationship with Jesus that he wants his friends to meet him too. He’s doing what Jesus said Simon would do—he’s fishing for men!

But “every party has a pooper,” right? Well, this one did. The Pharisees are not at the party but they’ve snooped around enough to know what’s going on at Levi’s house. So they bring their complaint to Jesus’ disciples.

“The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance’” (vv. 30–32).

There it is again. What is it that really qualifies us not just to belong to Jesus but to be called by him and used by him? Is it our sickness or our health? Is it our worthiness or our unworthiness?

There are three things we can learn from these four encounters. *First, Jesus’ primary mission is to deal with the problem of sin.* In v. 31 Jesus claims to be a physician of the soul. Only those who are morally sick need that kind of a doctor. Philip Yancey recounts stories of a woman named Juanita who was sold into sexual slavery by her own mother at the age of four. While other children went to school, she worked in a brothel, earning for her mother the higher rates paid for young girls. Eventually she had two children of her own, whom her mother took from her. With no education and no other skills, she continued working in the brothel, in the process becoming addicted to alcohol and cocaine. One day a customer grew enraged when she wouldn’t do what he asked, and hit her on the head with a baseball bat. She lay in a hospital bed, desperate. “I got on my knees and pled with God. I wanted somehow to escape prostitution, to become a real mother to my children. And God gave me a vision. He said, ‘Look for Rahab Foundation.’ I didn’t even know the word Rahab.” She found the organization’s phone number, though, and a few days later Juanita showed up, bruised and bandaged, at Rahab’s door. “I need help,” she said, sobbing. “I’m dying. I can’t take it anymore.” A kindly woman named Mariliana took her in and told her about God’s love. “I couldn’t believe the hope on Mariliana’s face,” Juanita recalled. “She smiled and hugged me. She gave me a clean bed, flowers in the room, and a promise that no men would harass me. She taught me how to be a real mother, and now I am studying a trade to live for the glory of God.” You see, that’s what Jesus came to do, not just with prostitutes, but with everyone.

Second, in order for that to happen, we have to recognize our own need and come to him in persistent faith. I've experienced need on a physical level the last month. It started with just a little twinge in my right knee. It got a little worse so I saw a nurse practitioner. The x-ray looked fine so they sent me to physical therapy. She even said I could jog, which unfortunately I did. My pain got so bad I could hardly walk. Now I was more motivated. I called her back and said I think we need to be a little more proactive, so she ordered an MRI. It took a week to get the results, but I hounded her every day. Finally, I found out Tuesday I have a torn meniscus, but I couldn't get into the doctor to figure out what to do about it until March 7. But I'm in pain! I told her I couldn't live with this until March 7. I may have to switch doctors. So she got me into a different doctor in the same group on Friday. He said they will need to do surgery. I went to schedule the surgery, but the doctor is on vacation. He gets back the last day of February, but I persisted and was able to schedule the surgery on the first of March. You see, I was motivated by my need. Jesus says we should have that same motivation on a spiritual level. Our soul really is torn, even diseased. We have a problem that we can't fix. We have to let that need drive us to Jesus. We may have to overcome a few obstacles to get there. Jesus once said, **"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force."** Like Peter dove off the boat and swam for shore; like the leper overcame social barriers to get to Jesus; and like the paralytic's friends dug through a roof, we have to be determined that nothing will keep me from Jesus. Jesus says the righteous don't do that because they don't think they need to. He says that tongue in cheek because no one is righteous, they just think they're righteous. Those who think they're righteous are on their own.

Finally, those who are healed and cleansed are also called to make fishing for men their highest priority. Simon Peter and Matthew both left everything and followed Jesus. It's not that they were now in full-time ministry; it's rather that whatever job they might have they couldn't help telling their friends about the Savior. Someone has defined evangelism as one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. If you find a good doctor, if he's really taking care of your need, you're going to send others to him. You can't do that if you only hang out with people who are well. Let me ask you a hard question: are you more like the teachers of the law or are you more like Levi? Are you spending all your time at church pot lucks with saints who look and talk a lot like you, or are you raising eyebrows by throwing dinner parties for sinners? Don't become so Christianized that you forget the mission of Christ. The church is the only fellowship on earth where the one requirement for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate.

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