

Models for Mission

Jesus – keeping the right company

Luke 5:27-32

Gordon Randall – Sunday, 24th February 2013

INTRODUCTION

Today we continue our sermon series – Models for Mission – looking at the Bible to see how others did evangelism and seeing what we can learn from this as we continue the mission of Jesus Christ here in Chineham and beyond. This morning we're looking at Jesus – keeping the right company. Please have your bible open at the passage because we'll be looking at various verses from our reading this morning from Luke.

I want to start by taking you back in Luke to chapter 4:18-19. Because here Jesus spells out – the sort of company he wants to keep. You might call it his recruitment policy. Jesus Says: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news **to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for **the prisoners** and recovery of sight **for the blind**, to release **the oppressed**, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

So with his manifesto in place Jesus sets out on his mission and by the time we get to chapter 5 we picture Jesus with total authority boldly seeking people for his company – he is the Chief Executive and he knows who he wants.

To help us work our way through this I've broken things down in four parts:

1. Who does Jesus keep company with?
2. What happens in Jesus' company?
3. Membership requirement for Jesus' company?
4. Recruiting our Levi to Jesus' company

1. WHO DOES JESUS KEEP COMPANY WITH?

Within the first eleven verses of chapter 5 Jesus grabs Simon – he is going to be his head disciple but with a new title 'Peter' which means 'the rock'. When Jesus returns to be with his Father in Heaven Simon, the Rock, Peter will be spokesman. But Simon's not a Rock. He's a fisherman, an ordinary bloke with no schooling. He didn't stand out in the local synagogue and he wasn't some great teacher. Peter was into fishing. He's was an **establishment outsider**. Unschooling, ordinary Peter. But Jesus sees his potential and says I want YOU as Head of the 12 disciples: I want YOU, v10, to catch men. And so he and his fishing partners James and John give it all up and join Jesus on His mission.

So we've got Jesus plus three now-unemployed fishermen. Then in 5: 12 – Jesus encounters a leper - a total **spiritual outsider** who's required to ring a bell and shout out “unclean”. He wasn't allowed in the synagogues – he was a total spiritual outsider. But in V.13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

Interesting company Jesus keeps – three unemployed fisherman and now a leper. But more is to come. In verses 18-26 he now welcomes the company of a paralytic - A **physical outsider**. So now Jesus keeps the company of three unemployed fishermen, a leper and a paralytic. And then we move to our passage today:

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, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Now this is an interesting move. So far he recruited three uneducated and now unemployed fishermen – then healed a leper followed by a paralytic – a little perplexing but now Jesus seeks the company of a tax collector! People couldn't stand tax collectors because they were corrupt. They collected taxes for the Roman Empire, but charged more to make extra cash for themselves. Levi was basically a thief and wouldn't have been high on anyone's priority list to get to know! He worked for the enemy – the Romans. A go-between. The Jewish face of the Roman oppression. He brought his own people under Roman domination, and stole vast amounts of money off them in the process.

In Matthew 9:9, the tax collector called by Jesus is named Matthew. In Mark 2:14 and this passage, he is named Levi. Many scholars believe Matthew and Levi are the same person. Matthew would be the Greek name, and Levi the Hebrew name. So here we're talking about the recruitment of one Jesus' 12 disciples. Levi, the tax collector is in bed with the enemy, getting rich off the misery of his own people. And yet Jesus says to him "Follow me". Interesting company Jesus keeps - the establishment outsider, the spiritual outsider, the physical outsider but now he seeks the company of this social outsider, this man we all hate and who is hateful. Levi was seen as a sinner through and through – he is a collaborator, a traitor, a thief. But Jesus sees he's potential and says: I want you.

These are the types of people Jesus keeps company with!

2. WHAT HAPPENS IN JESUS' COMPANY?

Here's this guy Levi who's in a financially lucrative situation, he knows what's-what and he calls the shots in his life. On the other hand there was Jesus – and a life with Him. A life where Jesus called the shots. There's no guarantee for Levi about the kind of future Jesus will bring him. If you want Jesus, there's no guarantee in this life of career, health, wealth, success, fame, prosperity. Following Jesus might mean losing your job. That's what happened to Levi. It's what happened to Peter, James and John. Jesus might pull the plug on all sorts of plans you've had – because He's in charge! There's only one guarantee for the followers of Jesus. If you follow Jesus, the one thing you'll get is Jesus. "Follow me" says Jesus and Levi gives up everything. Why? To be with Jesus. That's enough to change His life. And it does change his life - Instantly. Think of the change in Levi. It's remarkable. Verse 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.

Levi has what we might describe in 2013 Christ Church terms as a dialogue supper – in other words he holds a dinner party, invites his co-workers and friends and he brings them in to meet Jesus. Suddenly Levi has moved from hating people, robbing people and living a corrupt life to suddenly being God's go-between, drawing people under the influence of the LORD Jesus. Later he would write one of the four gospels – Jesus can spot potential!

Levi becomes who he's meant to be when he follows Jesus and that's the experience of millions down through history. Jesus doesn't come into our lives to stifle and repress us. He comes to release us from the junk that holds us back and to free us into who we're meant to be! Maybe through this reading this morning Jesus is calling you and saying "Follow me". Maybe he wants to liberate you from whatever you might be stuck in and free you into who you're meant to be? If that is you it may seem a little scary but if that's the case think of it like this- whatever He asks you to give up, it's only to release you. He's no kill-joy. What's the first thing that happens with Levi – there's a party and Jesus is right there at the centre of it. The reality of Jesus is he's the life and soul of the party – he invites us to that party now in this life and eternally. Jesus promises when He returns He will host a party to end all parties. On that day we will celebrate creation renewed, death swallowed up, disease abolished, evil destroyed, sin cleansed, tears wiped away and an eternity of joy with Him, the life and soul of the party. We're all invited. It costs you nothing. It cost me nothing. It cost Him everything! That's what happens in Jesus' company!

3. MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENT TO BE IN JESUS' COMPANY?

Let's be clear about the guest list to Jesus' party. It includes establishment outsiders, spiritual outsiders, physical outsiders and social outsiders. Most importantly it's for sinners. Anyone can come if they own up to being a sinner.

Look at v30-32: 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'?" 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."

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were the opposite of the outsiders. They were the 'holier than thou' religious types. They were the establishment, spiritual, physical and social insiders. The cream of the crop. And they've been looking on as Jesus has been recruiting for His Kingdom and picking all the wrong people.

So let's up-pack this a little bit...I am a typical bloke – I get full blown Man-Flu occasionally but I rarely go to the doctor. Fortunately for me my health has been reasonably good. So I rarely visit the doctor because most of the time I'm healthy. No-one visits their doctor and says, 'I'm a picture of perfect health, I thought you'd be impressed.' You'd be wasting their time. Doctors are for sick people. And Jesus is for sinners - only for sinners. So - are we sinners? Or do we claim to be righteous like the Pharisees? The Apostle Paul answers us in Romans 3:23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

So what is a sinner? Jesus likens sin to sickness. It's a good analogy. We all feel guilty about bad stuff we've said or done but actually the problem goes deeper. The real problem is an underlying sickness. And that's what sin is like. The bad stuff we do – that's like the symptoms, but the problem goes deeper. The sickness for some may show itself in pride and anger or for others it might come out as greed and gossip. Some will have really obvious symptoms – like our friend Levi - the tax collector. But we all have the same disease. "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Me, you, all of us. And here's the problem - we can't cure ourselves. We have a chronic, terminal illness called sin. And if we never come to the Doctor (Jesus), that sickness will go on forever.

Jesus - the Spiritual Doctor says: "I **have not come** to call the righteous, but **sinners** to repentance." Jesus has come for the establishment outsiders, the spiritual outsiders, the physical outsiders, the social outsiders. He has come for sinners. He has not come for the righteous. Jesus is not the spiritual prize-giver – rewarding the good and punishing the bad. Jesus is the spiritual doctor – attending to the sick and only the sick. And the bible and Jesus are clear - no-one is *actually* righteous.

4. RECRUITING OUR LEVI TO JESUS' COMPANY

Ruth and I have an old friend – he's not a follower of Jesus. However, last Christmas we invited him to the carol service. Amazingly he answered "yes" but jokingly said there would be lightning and thunder pouring down on him if he entered the church building. Okay – he was joking but deep down I suspect he feels he's not worthy enough to know God because just like all of us he has done wrong stuff in his life. He's exactly the sort of person Jesus is calling. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but fortunately in God's grace Jesus is for sinners. Through Jesus and only through Jesus we can be fixed. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we become princes and princesses – righteous before God. But not because of anything we've done but entirely because of what Jesus has done. He invites us to the party – all we have to do is accept. All our friend has to do is accept but it does help him if Ruth and I nudge him to Jesus' invitation in the first place. That's work in progress. Ruth has since had a very interesting soul search conversation with the same guy.

So what about your friends, family, your work colleagues, your acquaintances, your contact people, your Levi's – how are they? How can you invite them, how can you help them to see that as sinners (just like us) they are exactly the people Jesus is looking for. What's in the minds of our contact people? Maybe it's something like this: "I couldn't follow Jesus, I'm too bad for Jesus." But that's like saying "I'm too sick for the doctor." No-one is too bad to follow Jesus. If your contact person is saying "I can't follow Jesus, I'm not really a righteous type." Good! Thank God they're not righteous – because Jesus is for sinners. No-one is too bad to follow Jesus. Badness is the membership

requirement. The danger is this can sometimes be a challenge for the church that we don't like to face up to. As 'church-goers we have to ask ourselves sometimes - are we more like the Pharisees?

When Levi threw his party Jesus never hesitated. He was pleased to eat and drink with the very ones the "church crowd" avoided. How else could He share the good news of the kingdom of God with those who needed good news the most? The Pharisees didn't like this. And today, many Christians who are overly devoted to legalism and the appearance of righteousness probably wouldn't like it either. Many who claim the name of Jesus would never consider attending a banquet with the types of people Jesus shared a meal with that day. But what furthers the kingdom of God more?

Fellowshipping exclusively with those who are just like us? Or meeting the lost and the broken where they live and sharing the hope of the gospel and the forgiveness of sins for all who believe? Jesus showed us how we are to live that day at Levi's banquet. We are to share the good news with those who need it most, in humility and gratitude that we have been set free.

Because Jesus has come *to get sinners to turn away from their sins*. He hates the sin not the sinner. When Jesus says "follow Me" to sinners like Levi and us and your contact people, He's like a kind, merciful, wonderful doctor. He sees our sin-wounds and our sin-sicknesses and He says, "I can make you better if you will only believe and follow Me."

Conclusion.

The last word in our passage is 'Repentance'. It means to "change your mind," or to "turn away from sin." Jesus said He came to call sinners to repentance. He called Levi to repentance. When Levi decided to follow Jesus, he left his tax collection booth behind. Following Jesus required him to repent of his sin and turn away from the life that was separating him from God. Repenting doesn't mean you won't sin any more, but it does mean changing your mind about what you want to do. Levi wanted to follow Jesus who saw him and loved him when no one else did. Continuing to sin so boldly when he had been given a second chance just seemed wrong. So he left that life behind. He repented.

It's fantastic - Jesus wants to bring sinners like Levi and us and our contact people into His kingdom! He sees potential (we are all fearfully and wonderfully made) and His love for sinners leads Him to say "follow Me" to even the worst offenders. And a person who knows their sinful nature and sees how it keeps them from fellowship with God will readily follow Jesus into the kingdom. Their humble spirit allows repentance where once there was just bold and willful rebellion.

In giving our lives to Christ we have to admit fairly and squarely "I am a sinner. **Not** a sinner but-trying-ever-so-hard. **Not** a sinner but-not-as-bad-as-some. Just a sinner." That's who Jesus is for. Our hope is not in our health but in the Doctor's care. And the message is "Come to Christ – He wants your company and the company of your contact people".