



JESUS LOVES SINNERS

Part 20 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 5:27-32 | March 07, 2010

Luke 5:27-32

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."

JESUS IS A MISSIONARY

All right, Mars Hill, we continue in Luke today. If you've got a Bible, go to chapter 5:27-32 as we learn that Jesus loves sinners. And let me tell ya what you're going to learn about today is Jesus as a missionary. This is very, very, very important to Mars Hill Church. It is one of the ways in which we are a little different than some churches. That is that we see Jesus as God to be sure, but we see him coming into human history as a missionary. He's coming from the culture of heaven to the culture of earth, from the presence of angels to the presence of sinners. And in so doing, Jesus isn't legitimizing sin. He's not encouraging sin. He himself is not sinning, but he is loving sinners and he is building relationships with those who are far away from him as God to draw them near, to change their life, to forgive their sins, and that drives our philosophy of ministry here at Mars Hill Church.

We see ourselves as missionaries, like Jesus. Jesus says repeatedly, for example, in John's gospel more than twenty times: "The Father has sent me, the Father has sent me, the Father has sent me." Jesus is a missionary going into culture, and sadly, many churches and Christians only see mission work as happening outside of the country in a faraway land. We believe in that as well, but we believe mission is also exactly what we are called to, exactly where God has placed us. And that is that being a missionary doesn't include merely going around the world. Sometimes, most often, it means going across the street.

And so Jesus says repeatedly, "The Father sent me," and then he says to the Christians, "As the Father has sent me, I'm sending you." Jesus' last words after his death, burial, resurrection are, "Go; as you go, make disciples." Also Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses. Tell people about me. Show people the love that I have for them. Address the sin in their life that I died to forgive." So Jesus is a missionary.

HOW TO BE A GOOD MISSIONARY LIKE JESUS

We are individually missionaries, as Christians, and our church and its campuses are missional missionaries on mission. And the mission is that sinners would meet Jesus, and that's everybody, and everybody needs him. And we're going to learn about what it means to be a good missionary from Jesus.

1. FOLLOW JESUS

Point number one is follow Jesus. I'm gonna give you three steps today, a three-fold process. The first one of which is follow Jesus. Luke 5:27-28, "After this—" after Jesus is preaching and teaching and healing and curing leprosy and casting out demons, "He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."

So what we see here is Jesus as a missionary. He's outside of a sacred meeting. He's away from the religious people. He's away from what we would consider to be formal kind of church activities. And he does participate in the synagogue and he does go to worship services and he does gather with God's people, but he also goes out as a missionary, into the culture, into the world, and he pursues this man named Levi.

And this would have been very unexpected. Levi is a tax collector. Since the third century, there's been a big debate as to whether or not this is also Matthew who becomes a disciple of Jesus. We're not exactly sure. What we do know is that tax collectors were absolutely despised in that day. They're still not incredibly popular in our day. Levi was a guy sitting there collecting tolls and taxes and the way he got that job is that he would have put in a bid to the Roman government, which was ruling over the Jewish people, and the highest bidder would be able to then assume the job as a tax collector. Well, the only way then to make your money back was to overtax people, so you'd have to collect a certain amount of tax for the government and if you could squeeze people for additional money beyond what they owed, that would be your profit margin.

To make matters worse, Levi is himself Jewish, so he is corruptly ripping off, through essentially extortion, his own people to fund a godless overbearing government that has taken them over. This would be the equivalent today of saying Levi was a guy who worked for the IRS and was a member of Al-Qaeda. You couldn't like this guy less. He's a guy who has a lot of money and a lot of power but not a lot of friends, and people don't approach him. This is the guy you stay away from. You don't initiate any conversation with him because he's just going to rip you off.

And what Jesus does is very unexpected: Jesus approaches him. Jesus initiates relationship with him. This is the doctrine of election: that we don't look for God, that God looks for us, that we're not seeking God, that God is seeking sinners. Levi's a sinner. He's not out looking for Jesus. He hasn't even gotten off his chair. He's not pursuing Jesus, requesting Jesus, but Jesus comes to him. That's election. And then calling, it's a theological term, that Jesus calls him to change his life, to repent of his ways, and to demonstrate that by literally walking away from his career, his vocation, his wealth, his power, his income, his tax table and being a follower of Jesus, which is an act of repentance in faith, that he's repenting of his old way of life and he's trusting Jesus for a new way of life. And what we see here is Jesus is not just forgiving sinners, but he's befriending sinners. He's inviting this man to do what he invites us all to do and that is to be followers of him. He's the leader, we're the follower. It's all about Jesus.

So step number one is follow Jesus. Are you following Jesus? Have you walked away from sin, your old way of life, to follow Jesus into new way of life? First step is you've got to have a personal relationship with Jesus to where he talks to you, in large part through Scripture, as he talked to Levi, you respond to him in prayer. That's conversation that builds personal relationship. You stick close to Jesus. You repent of sin that gets between you and Jesus. You trust Jesus. You want to be like Jesus. You want to be near Jesus. You want to be for Jesus. You want to follow Jesus. That's step one.

2. START A COMMUNITY GROUP

Step number two that we see is that it is good to start a community group, that's exactly what Levi does. Levi's been a Christian for just a short bit, minutes or hours, and immediately he's right into ministry and immediately he's right into community. And this is very important because some of you have followed Jesus, but you've not been in community with God's people. It's as if following Jesus is all that God expects and that being in community is a bonus if and when you have time for it. To become a Christian is to be reconciled to God through Christ and to be reconciled to Christians through Christ so that you are both a Christian and a member of the church in community on mission with Jesus and his people. It's both. It's both. It's a personal relationship with Jesus and it is a community of people who are in relationship with you and relationship with Jesus all together.

We'll read it. Luke 5:29, "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." Now here's what's going on. Levi has walked away from his income stream, his crooked, corrupt job. Becoming a Christian sometimes requires this. We recently had a guy at Mars Hill I was talking to, he was a drug dealer and he's met Jesus. So he had to throw away all of his drugs and go get another job. He had to walk away from his income stream. He had to walk away from his lifestyle. He had to walk away from his corrupt business practices. In the providence of God, he got a job as a salesman, which is hilarious, and by God's grace, he's doing really well and his sales business is going great and he loves Jesus deeper every day. But sometimes that's what's required, that you can't faithfully serve Jesus and have a certain kind of job or income or lifestyle, you've got to immediately, not a little bit at a time, walk away from it.

Now what does Levi immediately do thereafter? He invites all his friends over to his house to meet Jesus. He becomes very generous. Immediately you can see the Holy Spirit at work in his heart. He goes from being a very greedy man, to being a very generous man. As soon as he meets Jesus, he wants other people to meet Jesus and so he throws a huge party. And you need to know that throwing parties is a ministry. It's a ministry that a lot of churches aren't great at, but opening your home to invite people over, family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, Christians, non-Christians, building community, building relationships, and when you do that, and you should, be generous. Feed them well, make it fun, make it nice.

This guy goes to great expense to throw what the Bible calls, "a great feast." So he had to clean his house. He had to prepare for guests. He probably didn't have guests very often. He's not a popular guy. He had to go buy food and drinks and plates and silverware and napkins and he had to accept that people were gonna track mud into his house and that somebody was gonna spill something and it was gonna cause some stain in the floor or the carpet. The point is this: our homes are not false functional heavens that we set up to be perfectly tidy and clean until we go to the real heaven. They're places of hospitality to welcome in people and to invite them to enjoy one another and the goodness and the kindness of Jesus in their midst. He said, at the end, before he ascended back into heaven, that he would be with us always until the end of the age. And when we practice hospitality and we open our homes and lives, we are showing something of the gospel. As God invites us into community with him to be his people, as we're inviting people into our home and life, we're showing something of the character of our God and Jesus promises to be with us, particularly when we do these things, because Jesus, just like he pursued and chose and called Levi, he is pursuing, calling, choosing people. And sometimes he does that in our own home as we invite them in for friendship and love and community and conversation.

And this is exactly what Levi does. I want you to see that this is natural, normal Christian life. Follow Jesus and be in community. Follow Jesus and welcome other people into your life. Follow Jesus and welcome other people into your home. Practically this means you've got to consider where will we or where will I live? Will it be a place that we can entertain? Will it be a place that can accommodate other people?

We, my wife, Gracie, and I, we've moved three times in five years. Where we're at now, we've been for a few years and we intend to be for a long time. And we wanted to stay within the city and we wanted to have enough space to entertain. And Gracie wanted the kitchen open 'cause she loves hospitality, but she hates being separated from everyone. So we knew we'd need a place with hardwood floors—why? 'Cause if you're gonna have a lot of people over, you're just gonna trash the carpet so don't even worry about it. We wanted a place that had a playroom so when all the little kids come over, they could put dress-ups on and play with toys and have fun. We wanted a little bit of parking so that we could actually have large numbers

of guests over. We wanted to have a guestroom so that people could stay with us when they're coming in from out of town. We wanted to buy an additional car, a used car, nothing fancy but something simple so that when guests came in from out of town and pastors are coming in and leaders are coming in or somebody needs help, they can stay with us and have a vehicle to drive. We could feed them and care for them, and we put all of this into our plan and we put all of this into our budget and we put together our life in such a way that we're able to entertain. We're able to invite people in, to enjoy them, to serve them. And I say that not to boast and to brag, but to say that's a wonderful thing to do. That's an amazing thing to do.

So many people have stereotypes of Christians and the kind of people that we are and those stereotypes, sadly, are sometimes earned and they can be broken down and shown not to be totally consistent in all cases by you being generous, you being hospitable, you opening your home, you thinking through entertaining, you using the opportunities and relationship that God gives to bring people in, to feed them, to laugh with them, to enjoy them, to love them, to get into their life, to hear their story, to be honest about your own sins, faults, failures, and flaws so you don't come off like the religious person, and enjoy their company and let them enjoy yours and meet some Christians. Some of you are not bold evangelists, you're not gonna just, like Jesus, walk up to someone, but you can open your home and you can bring over those people that are really bold and they can close all your friends. That's not a bad idea either. But Levi immediately makes all of this possible.

Now let me say this as well, these people are connecting in community before they're converting to Christ. They're not Christians yet, but they're people made in the image and likeness of God and God loves them. And so our view at Mars Hill is that we're an open church—anybody can come to church, anybody can come to community group. People are welcome to connect in community before they're converted to Christ. And the way this primarily works itself out is what we like to call "community groups." These are groups of people meeting in condos and dorms and homes and apartments and military bases and frat houses and wherever else people are living, in groups, 10, 12, 15. Some of the groups are huge and they need to replicate. We're developing leaders as the groups are growing very fast.

What we do on Sunday is what we call the air war. It is preaching and teaching and worshiping and gathering in large numbers, and then we also have community groups, which are smaller groups of people that are on mission together as the church, owning the mission of the church to see people meet Jesus and those who already know him, to grow in becoming more like him. That happens in community together in relationship, Bible open, life open, home open so that the grace of God can flow freely and unencumbered and the Holy Spirit can have his way with people.

Right now we've got about four hundred community groups and they tend to follow the sermon. Some take a break and do other things, but what I preach on Sunday, then there is discussion and application and repentance and a meal and people doing life together, inviting in non-Christians, family, friends, coworkers, going out to serve the community, service projects for those who are in need, trying to extend the love of Jesus to the cities that our various campuses and groups are in. There are about five thousand-plus people in groups every week. A few years ago, it was a very small number. Under the leadership of Pastor Brad and many other pastors that are owning the mission of the community groups at the various campuses, and their coaches and their community group leaders and their community group hosts and their community group administrators, you get the idea. This is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. That number has gone up considerably and it keeps going up. The number of groups that we have, the number of people in groups that we have keeps going up.

We're not totally opposed to Sunday school classes but one of the reasons we don't stack a lot of classes on Sunday, we don't want you to do all of your life with God and his people in one building. We want you to bring your friends to church, take them out for a meal. We want you to have community groups in your homes. We want to spread the good news of Jesus into all of the various neighborhoods that surround our campuses. We want you to not have to drive people in long distances. If they want to come on Sunday, the traffic's better and that's great, but sometimes the best thing is just to open your home, have people over, host a community group like Levi does, bear the expense emotionally, financially, relationally, to open up your home, bring people together and see what God does. And that's in every way what we call the ground war. It's the scattering. All right, we have gathering and we have scattering and it is both. It is coming together as God's people and then going out as God's people. So we come together for teaching and worship and we scatter for mission and community. And that's how the whole church is built.

And what's really exciting now is that as the community groups are growing in particular areas, they're starting to gather together every month or two by region. There'll be hundreds of people saying, "We love this part of our city or region." And they're strategizing together: "How could we mobilize for service, help the poor, look after single mothers, help those in need, help the abuse and rape victims? Where are we needed? How can we come together? How can we mobilize? What can we do?" Pastor Zack Hubert has created "The City," which is our online social networking tool that allows a lot of this to get coordinated and for virtual community to be built on actual community. It's amazing what God has done. I couldn't be more excited. I love to preach, but I know that without community and community groups and connecting software like The City, all it becomes is a bunch of information, not a lot of transformation.

And we see this in the life of Jesus. Jesus preached to large crowds and was invited to community groups and his ministry had both, thousands of people and homes filled with people. He did both. We do both because we love Jesus and we want to follow in his example.

Now let me say this as well; as these regions are gathering together and these community groups are gathering, those are going to be groups that ultimately form into new campuses. So our whole ideology for new campuses is people doing what Levi did. Some of you may say, "How in the world can I be at the epicenter of the starting of a whole new campus or a church plant?" Easy, number one: follow Jesus. Number two: start a community group. As that group grows, split it into multiple community groups. As those groups multiply in a region, bring them together every month or two. We've got all the coaching systems, the requirements, the assessment, the training for all of this. We'll equip you to do this—gladly, I might say. And then as enough groups are meeting in an area, that becomes a few hundred people and they launch their own campus or their own church.

This is how we grow, expand, extend Mars Hill Church. Just keep moving out. Why? 'Cause we want as many people as possible to enjoy a

relationship with Jesus like Levi did, and he wanted his friends to meet Jesus and you want your friends to meet Jesus. So you own the mission in your community, in the place that you live, with the people that God has sovereignly put in front of you for relationship.

Step number one: follow Jesus. Pray, read your Bible, repent of your sin, trust in Jesus, follow him. Step number two: start a community group. Some of you are like the friends of Levi, you just need to get in a group and get started there and eventually by the grace of God and the training of others, you'll become a leader. Some of you are at the place that you're mature enough or God has called you or you're willing to take a crack at it that you need to be a community group leader and you need to be willing to, in some regard, oversee, pastor—I know it's a scary word—a group of people and be involved in their life. And this is exciting. This is wonderful.

Levi, within minutes, goes from absolute non-Christian extortionist to heart-changed follower of Jesus practicing hospitality, opening his home, launching a community group. Fantastic, we love this. We love this. And a lot of the leaders at Mars Hill have had a similar experience. There is a very high percentage of leaders at Mars Hill who walked in like Levi, non-Christians, met Jesus, followed Jesus, started doing ministry and now are used mightily of God. We want that for all of you. What else are you gonna do with your life, your time, your talent, your treasure? It's cool to have a place to live, but what if nobody comes over? It's really cool to have nice furniture, what if nobody ever meets Christ on it? It's cool to have a dining room table, but what if nobody else comes over and opens up their life and talks about their hurts and gets prayed for there? See, so much of the American life is that we build heaven on earth and then we're just desperately lonely because we're selfish and dying. And like God, we need to welcome everybody in with all the mess and the chaos and the inconvenience and the frustration of it because lives get changed. That's how our God works. He comes to earth and that's what he does.

3. REPENT, REPENT, REPENT

Step number three: repent, repent, repent. That's what it's all about. Here is the story. Luke 5:30–32, “And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’” Here's what's going on. Jesus pursues Levi. Levi follows Jesus. Levi goes and gets all of the nut jobs, the wing nuts, the gals in clear heels, the guys that still smell like pot. He gets all the very peculiar, social misfits, outcasts. I mean, this looks like an episode of *Celebrity Rehab*. Everybody's got an interesting story to tell. These people definitely aren't going to church and they come to Levi's house. See, there are a lot of people that will feel far more comfortable in your house than in the church, so invite them to your house.

And here's what happens. The religious people, the Pharisees and the scribes, look around and they start criticizing, “What is Jesus doing?” Let me just say this: beware of anyone who wants you to be holier than Jesus. There is no one holier than Jesus but sometimes religious people want you to be holier than Jesus. Here the religious people want the disciples of Jesus to be holier in their estimation than Jesus.

THE SCRIBES AND THE PHARISEES

But let me unpack this for you. He mentions the scribes and the Pharisees. They will appear repeatedly as sort of the religious antagonists against Jesus throughout this gospel and the others. Now a scribe was a professional theologian, they were formally trained. They were formally trained. These are guys who were enjoying the equivalent of seminary or Bible college. They've memorized books of the Bible. They're very studious. These are the geeks for God. They love footnotes. It's those guys. And they're very serious and they love to make rules and lists and impose their will on others because they're the holy men who serve God, very serious.

And under them were Pharisees. Now Pharisees were the working class, not formally theologically educated masses. And these would be the groups of people who are very zealous, very devoted, very motivated for their scribe. And the scribe then, in an effort to extend their authority, would add rules to the Bible and they would impose them on people and bind them to live not just according to the Scriptures, but according to the traditions of the scribe. And so the Pharisees were— They were passionate, they were devoted, they become some of the most influential leaders in early Judaism. After the temple is destroyed in 70 A.D., they become the predominant voice for the Jewish people. They miss Jesus. Some, in fact, did love Jesus, but the majority rejected him.

And here's what's going on. The Pharisees would choose a scribe and they would want this to be their teacher, and so they would ask the scribe, “Could I please be on your team? Would you be my teacher?” And if it was a very popular sort of rock star, lots of friends on Facebook, lots of Twitter followers kind of scribe, there was a long line of people who wanted to be in his closed community, be taught by him, led by him and also religiously praised by him. So it was sort of an application process. “Oh, I want to be with so and so.” And what you would do then is you would give money to the scribe, and some of the scribes got very, very, very rich. And you would serve the scribe. So the scribe now became sort of a spoiled, soft, spiritual leader. Everybody's taking care of them and tending to their every need and giving them lots of money and praising them all the time and thinking that they speak on behalf of God and their authority is almost equivalent to Scripture, and what they say is law and you better obey it otherwise the other people in the community that are also among the Pharisees on your team, they will shame you, they will scorn you, they will come against you. Lot of fear, control, and intimidation, as is always the case with religion.

And what you really wanted if you were a Pharisee, you wanted your kids to get trained by that scribe. So you think almost in terms of an exclusive prep school. There are lots of scribes but some of them, boy, if your kid could get into that scribe's school, wow. Now they're gonna be really respected. They're earning potential's gonna go up. Their spiritual pride and perfection will be increased. You could put a bumper sticker on your camel, you know, “My kid's an honor roll student at Rabbi Gamaliel's class.” It's a big deal. There's a lot of social pressure to get your family under the right scribe, get your kid under the right scribe.

So you're paying money, you're doing favors, you're serving this guy. You're in every way stroking his ego so that he will increase your religious position in the community. And if you got your kid in under this guy, this particular scribe that you wanted, you'd have to continue to pay a lot of money. And then your kid would have to swear allegiance to the scribe above their own parents. So the scribe became second only to God. He's almost a mediator, like Jesus, but a false mediator. He tells you what to do, he tells you what God says and you just obey him. He's in the false functional position of savior, lord and Christ, very dangerous, spiritual abuse. And then your child would have allegiance to the scribe beyond their own parents and they would follow this scribe around. They'd listen to every word he said, copiously take notes. The kids are all competing against one another. Who's gonna memorize the most Hebrew? Who's gonna memorize the most books of the Old Testament? Who's gonna pass the oral exams? Who will answer all the scribe's questions? Who will be able to follow in his ways and not forget any of his rules and live really strictly and obediently so that maybe someday if you did a really good job, then God would love you, then God would embrace you, then God would accept you. It's corrupt religion at its core, and everything, sometimes even Christianity, has some form of this sickness.

And what would happen then is if you got the right rabbi and you paid enough money and you served well enough and the scribe accepted you and your child worked really hard, they could pass their classes. They could become a religious leader, which was a very honored position in the community. And when they were about forty years of age, right around my age, I'll be forty in October, your child could become a scribe. They could be in this position of spiritual authority. They could write books. They could give lectures. They could open their own school. They could get their own students. They could make a lot of money. They could be very powerful. They could take care of you in your old age.

And the children and the adults who were in the community of the Pharisees were in a closed community. To get into that community, you had to apply, you had to earn it. You had to give generously. You had to work hard. It's not like Mars Hill. Not a grace-centered community where everybody's welcome. You can come for free and you don't have to do anything, but if you meet Jesus and the Holy Spirit's in you, you'll want to, out of grace, not out of guilt, not because you have to but because you want to. Not so that God will love you but because of Christ he already has. Totally different motivation.

And one of the big honors was once you got accepted to one of these closed communities, you and your family got to eat together with the other families in the tribe of Pharisees and sometimes you could even eat with the scribe. The scribe would come into the meal and, "Here's the holy man. Here's the holy man. He's here with us. We're closer to God because we're under scribe so and so. We're closer to God because we get the real teaching. As long as we obey his rules, God's okay with us." And so you would only eat in a friendly community way with the other Pharisees, not even the Pharisees in the other schools. You wouldn't eat with people from other denominations or traditions. They didn't have it quite right. Their scribe was not as good as your scribe. Your scribe was better than their scribe and there was religious conflict and pride and pecking order.

You would eat with your friends and you would eat with your community and you would undergo testing for anywhere from a month to a year to even be allowed into the community, and then you could live near these people and you could eat with these people and you could be friends with these people. Now your children could intermarry with these people and you could keep a pure, spiritual bloodline and you all could have the same beliefs, not just what the Bible said, that's actually a good idea, but what your scribe said. 'Cause see, people sometimes want to go beyond the Bible thinking that the more they do, the more holy they become. The truth is the further you move away from Scripture, the more deceived and demonic you become, the more religious you inevitably become.

And so what is Jesus doing here? Jesus is going to Levi's house. This is where it's mind blowing for the religious people. Jesus is a religious leader, he's a rabbi, he's a teacher. They would have considered him like a scribe. I mean, he's a bit of a rock star. He's filling up synagogues all over the region of Galilee, people are coming out. Jesus could have chosen the most amazing school of Pharisees. He could have picked the wealthiest people, the most ambitious kids, the highest IQers, he could have gone for them. He could have opened up an application process, assessment process, down payment, monthly fee, massive money, never have to work hard again. He could have bought a phat house and a vacation house and a back-up vacation house. Everybody wanted to be on his team. Some of the scribes and Pharisees who were coming to listen to him are wondering, "Should we join Jesus' team? Seems like there's a lot of money in that one. Boy, the marketing campaign behind that guy would be easy: casts out demons, cures lepers, preaches with authority and power, heals the sick."

So Jesus could pick anyone he wants to be his disciple, to follow his teaching. Jesus can go to any house he wants and have a sacred meal with anyone he wants. And who does he pick? He picks the most unlikely group. He picks Levi. I mean, he picks Levi! That's unbelievable. Nobody picked Levi for anything, and Jesus picks him to be a disciple. And Jesus is gonna put him on a team with Peter, James, and John and since they're from the same region, it's not inconceivable that these guys didn't even get along 'cause Peter, James, and John run a fishing business and Levi is a tax collector. So these guys are duking it out all the time and now Jesus is putting at the core of his ministry, some guys who really disagree, probably already had conflict, and Jesus picks Levi, the most unlikely person.

Not only does he pick Levi, he picks him publicly. He just walks up to the tax booth. This is like you go up to the strip club and there's the bouncer out front, you're like, "You and me, we're doing ministry." Seriously, you did that in front of the line? Everybody saw that, right, they got a photo of it on their iPhone, now they're twittering it. What?

Here's what they say, I love what they say. The scribes and the Pharisees, they grumbled, they're complaining, "What is this? We don't like this." Now, they weren't actually at the meal because they would never go to the meal. I don't know if they're peering in through a window or they're standing down the street, saying "What in the world is up with that house party? I see a lot of gals in clear heels. I think that guy's got a joint. That guy's packing a nine. What? Thugs, I see neck tattoos on the four-year-old girls, this is a rough crowd." They're watching. They don't understand. "Why doesn't Jesus want to eat with us? You know what Jesus should do? He should put himself under our scribe and then one day he could be our scribe when he gets

about oh, seven years older. He's too young."

"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" There's a whole bunch of tax collectors and sinners. That's a junk-drawer term. Here's a guy with track marks down his arm. You know, here's the single mom in rehab. Here's the kid who's pushing dime bags at the junior high. What? Here's the dad who really likes Hennessy and strippers. What? What are these people doing having dinner with Jesus? It's amazing, isn't it, who Jesus picks? See, this is what's amazing. Some of us are Christians, we think, "God picked me, I must be special." No, no, no, God's special. You're "special" in a different way. Oh, you're very "special," but not in the way you think. That's why as Christians, we're told that God chose the lowly, the weak, the despised, the things that are not to shame the things that are. See, God picks nobodies and he loves them. That's my story, that's your story. And see, religious people don't get that. They're like, "What in the world? How in the world could God love these people?" That's just the way God is. See, God's love is a pure free grace. God doesn't look at us and find us to be lovely. God looks at us and loves us until we become lovely. That's how God works. It's antithetical to religion. Now, they are grumbling. They are slandering. They are frustrated. "How could he possibly do this? Religious people are not supposed to eat with sinners."

You notice what they say, "He eats and drinks with them." You could still get in a lot of trouble for that. Am I encouraging gluttony and drunkenness? No. Is Jesus accused of gluttony and drunkenness? Yes. He's accused falsely, wrongly. Jesus didn't overeat and Jesus didn't overdrink, but he did eat and drink. And Jesus was not sinning. He was being a good missionary.

Now, I need to thread the needle on this when it comes to alcohol. Underage drinking is a sin because Romans 13 says, "Obey the government." So don't drink if you're under age. Don't drink and drive. Don't sell alcohol to a minor. Don't break any of the laws; obey the law. Don't become addicted to it. Don't be mastered by anything. Don't get drunk. Paul says to the Ephesians, "Don't get drunk, be filled with the Holy Spirit." You want to be under the control of something, don't make it alcohol, make it the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit fill you. Don't cause others to stumble. If you're having a meal with someone whose conscience doesn't permit them to drink alcohol, don't have a glass of wine with dinner. Don't. If you have a community group and someone who's a recovering alcoholic shows up, don't invite them out for a beer and chicken wings. Don't have a glass of wine with your meal. It's better to love people who are struggling than it is to exercise your freedom in Christ. Religious people want to take away your freedom in Christ. You should keep it but occasionally you should give it away, say, "I'm free in Christ to do this or that but because I love you and this is difficult for you, I'm going to give up that freedom because you're more important than my freedom." Fellowship is more important than freedom. Freedom is important, but fellowship is more important because Christ died for people, not just ideas. That being said, it's not a sin to have a glass of wine. I would tell you from a health perspective, don't be a habitual drinker, don't be hitting a lot of hard alcohol and blow out your liver. Don't be a fool. Don't use your freedom in Christ to harm yourself or others.

But what Jesus does, he goes to a party hosted by Levi with a really crazy-looking cast of characters that honestly, if somebody took a photo of him at that moment and put it on the wrong blog or website or sent it out to the wrong media outlet, the Christian world would go bananas. "This is Jesus. Scandalous! Look at the people he's spending time with. And what is that in his hand? He has a glass of wine and he has something to eat. Oh, no. Thankfully the scribes took a photo and the Pharisees got the word out." But he's not sinning. He's not sinning. You need to thread the needle on it. This is what missionaries do. They thread the needle. They're in the culture, but they're not in sin. They're with sinners, but not sinning with them. This is what Jesus does.

JESUS IS THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

Jesus goes on to say, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." He's being sarcastic, ironic here because the religious people are like, "Why are you with the sinners?" They don't think that they're sinners. See, religious people don't see that religion's among the worst sins of all. And what Jesus says is, "You know what? These people are sinners." He doesn't even argue. He doesn't say, "Well, you know, yeah, he's drunk but, you know, he's had a hard life." Or, "Yeah, she's living with her boyfriend, but, you know, her dad, you know, abandoned her when she was little and she's got this big hole in her heart for guys." And, "Yeah, so and so, you know they, yeah, they got some anger issues but you know they've really had a rough go of it and they grew up in a rough neighborhood so sometimes they just lose it." He doesn't excuse people's sin. He doesn't blame others for their sin. He doesn't deny their sin. He doesn't minimize their sin.

He looks at the Pharisees and says, "You say they're sinners. You know what? I agree with you. These people have a lot of sin in their life. The question is, what are we gonna do about it? Are we gonna create nice little holy huddles, churches just for Christians, Bible studies just for Christians, life just for Christians, events just for Christians, or are we gonna go to them, not expect them to come to us, we go to them like I went to Levi and I go to the party, love them, serve them, help them because here's the deal. Yeah, they're sick, but yeah, I'm doctor." That's what Jesus says and that's an amazing analogy. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." See, if you looked at a doctor and he was surrounded with sick people, you wouldn't say, "What a horrible doctor." You'd say, "Well, that's a good doctor. That's what doctors do." They hang out with sick people to make them better.

Jesus is the great physician. He hangs out with sick sinners to make us saved and better. That's what he does. He forgives sin and he changes lives, that's what Jesus does. And the religious people sadly need him as well, but they don't see it. The truth is we're all sinners by nature and choice. We're all sick with sin. We all need the great physician and we can't just look at the sin in other people's lives like the religious people do and say, "There's all the sick people, we need to quarantine ourselves." We need to say, "I'm also sick, maybe in a different way. They're addicted to alcohol. I'm addicted to self-righteousness. They're addicted to pornography. I'm addicted to judging everyone and sitting in the little seat as divinity declaring who's in and out of the kingdom of God and apart from the grace of God."

The truth is we're all sick. You're a sinner and at least these people who are with Jesus, they know it. That's a good place to start. Religious people struggle with that. They struggle to see their religion as sin. Their rule-making, their rule-keeping, their zealous devotion to a teacher, an author, a team, a tribe that's not in the Bible as a sin.

Now, what Jesus says is we all need to repent. Repent, repent, repent. All right, Martin Luther nails the Ninety-Five Theses that launched the Protestant Reformation on the Wittenberg door. He starts with this line: "All of a Christian's life is one of repentance." Repent, repent, repent. Where am I wrong? Where am I sinful? Where am I off? Jesus, where am I not following you? Where am I not obeying you? Where am I not honoring you in that position of scribe? See, Jesus is our scribe. He's in the highest position of authority. Repent, repent, repent. It's a change of mind. Jesus, you're right, I'm wrong. Scripture you're right, I'm wrong. Repent, repent, repent.

Is there hope for the sinners? Yeah, you see Levi gets saved. He goes right into ministry. There's hope for all of these sinners. Is there hope for the religious people? There actually is. There's a story in the Bible of a Pharisee who gets saved. His name's Saul. You may know him as Paul. He changed so much that God changed his name. He's a guy who was murdering Christians like the early church deacon Stephen. He tells us in his testimony, Philippians 3, "I was a Pharisee. I was devoted." But he was wrong. And as he grows in relationship with Jesus, he's nearing the end of his life. Two of the last letters of the Bible that he penned were 1 and 2 Timothy. You'd think after walking with Jesus faithfully as a Christian, actually writing books of the Bible by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that maybe at the end Paul would say, "By the grace of God, I am no longer a sinner. I don't have to repent anymore." Instead, this is what he tells his friend, Timothy. 1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." The closer you get to Jesus, the longer you follow Jesus, the more you realize that you're not like him, that you're a sinner and you're sick and you're selfish and that you need Jesus to be the great physician. You can't heal yourself.

STORIES FROM COMMUNITY GROUPS

I'll close with a few stories from community groups. I thought this would be fun. I asked some of our community group leaders, "Tell me some of the crazy stories from your community groups." I want you to be in a community group, so you sign up today.

Anna says, "I told my children to invite a friend of my kids to Bible study and in this study, everybody took turns reading a Bible verse." That's weird: "Everybody read." The non-Christian's like "I don't know these words." "This person was very nervous about reading big words she had never seen from the Bible and when it was her turn to read, she said genitals instead of gentiles." That's awesome. That's funny. This is what happens at community group, people come in and they don't know the difference between gentiles and the other "G" word.

Jeremy says, "A hyper, talkative, young dude joined our community group over a month ago and drove me nuts with his intense and immature personality and monologuing. He reminded me too much of myself. Well, he got picked up by the cops for a past crime—" Yes, "Two weeks ago so now I get to learn about visiting people in jail." Amen.

Give you a few more. Stacey says, "When I moved to Seattle, I came to Mars Hill. For me, it was quite a potent dose of culture shock. Between my own religious Pharisee-like tendencies and my coming straight from a very active, conservative southern Baptist church"—we love them, "I really did not know what to make of Mars Hill when I got here." We understand. "As I met people and got involved in community group, I was really confused. My thought was well, they say they're Christian but they watch TV, dress fashionably, say naughty words, sometimes dress less than modestly, display affection with boyfriends and girlfriends." Just so you know, not everybody at Mars Hill's a Christian, not everybody at Mars Hill claims to be a Christian, and some of the people in Mars Hill are very brand-new Christians. "My black-and-white mindset had a difficult time wrapping around it. No longer could I place everyone in a hierarchy as being either more or less spiritually mature than I. People were simply at different places with their walks in Christ, some were strong, others were weak. There was no personal model of who a religious person was to be other than Jesus. I learned that I cannot judge and categorize people quickly but rather it takes some time getting to know people, to see them through the lens of the gospel, to appreciate their strengths and learn how to support them in their weakness. It has also led me one by one to take my judgments before God in prayer, wrestling with them, repenting of them and re-evaluating them in order to discern the voice of wisdom versus the voice of religion." Judge people by where they've come from, not where they're at. Some people you may not consider mature until you see how much ground they have covered following Jesus.

How about this one—there's a lot of good ones. Find another one. Some of these are very long. Miriam says, "I used to attend a community group that was really close to where I live. I attended more out of convenience than anything else because I felt pressured into it. I disliked going, not because the girls were bad or anything, but I just wasn't getting much out of it. One night all of us girls were sitting around talking about whatever girls talk about. I wasn't paying attention. Then in the middle of a fairly benign conversation, one of the girls who was brand-new to the community group said, 'Well, I'm just going to share my testimony.'" This will happen. People will just tell you their life story. "'When I was younger, I was molested by my stepfather and my last two boyfriends almost raped me.' Immediately my heart jumped into my throat. My heart broke for this girl but at the same time, I was so incredibly uncomfortable with the depth of the information she had just shared so flippantly. I couldn't remember her name or how old she was, yet I knew this deep, dark, not-so-secret secret. It blew my mind." Welcome to community. "Luckily my community group leader is much better at handling those sorts of situations and she eased into this new abrupt topic of conversation with ease. I kept checking the time on my phone and finally left awkwardly 15 minutes later. I regret how I treated her in that situation. I shouldn't have let myself be so shocked at this girl's story and how blunt she was in sharing it. I was in a community group that catered to the Seattle area and its broken people. Because of her life in Jesus, she has no reason to feel shame for what has been done to her and I wish at that time, I could have loved her and opened my arms to her." You will.

I love this one: "We started a community group sometime back that had a couple of saved drug dealers. That made for some interesting conversations on how Jesus saves. Within three weeks, we had seventeen people driving in, many, many miles and we're talking about the greatness of Jesus and the

urgency of acting on his grace and his word. Somehow we entered their past experiences and how they were saved and as it turned out, they started comparing their 'My prison story tops your prison story' conversation. There was so much laughter and drawing together in Jesus and a very cool camaraderie entailed as we went deep into the night. No one wanted to leave."

Others go on and on and on. We could do this for the rest of our lives. We could do this for the rest of our lives. I'll give you one more. It's about a couple who was very religious, showed up in suits and business suits ready to criticize. They joined a community group and who shows up at their community group? A gal with an enormous mohawk. What do they do? Immediately realize that she's new to Christ, so much so that she not only wanted to go to community group, that she walked, walked, yeah, I said walked, over an hour to get there. And these formerly religious, judgmental people who looked at the outside but didn't know the heart like Jesus does, they had a breaking and they said, "You know what? She's a new Christian. She's a sister. She loves Jesus. The six-inch mohawk is sort of cool even though we're not and rather than her walking an hour each way to community group, we'll go pick her up."

YOU'RE WELCOME AT MARS HILL AND JESUS LOVES YOU

Here's the bottom line, I'll close with this. "To the gals in clear heels, to the guys in clear heels, to the drunks, the addicts, the perverts, the victims, the porn stars, the prostitutes, the adulterers, the thieves, the obese gluttons who think that a waist is a terrible thing to mind, the *Twilight* fans, the murderers, the mama's boys, the losers, the freaks, the geeks, people who think wrestling is real, red necks, guys who own action figures, chain smokers, everyone who does not use a turn signal while texting and talking on the phone in their car, men who live with their mother, women who get paid in \$1 bills, dudes in dresses—" seen it at Mars Hill, "Democrats, Republicans, the guys at the gym who walk around the locker room naked singing Bon Jovi's *Living on a Prayer*, Mormons and anyone else who wears sacred underbritches, whoever is responsible for the creation and ongoing sale of men's Lycra biking shorts, guild leaders, yoga instructors, witches, pot heads, meat heads, crack heads, deadheads and meth heads, Trekkies, people who don't recycle, the rainbow-loving, tree-hugging, Prius-driving leftists, and religious people who do not know what I am talking about because these subjects were not on *Little House on the Prairie* or covered in their home school co-op, I have good news for you: You're welcome at Mars Hill. Jesus loves you. You'll fit right in and because he died for all your sins, you get to repent. I'll pray.

Father God, thank you for the resurrection of Jesus that brings new life. Thank you, Jesus, for being the great physician who comes to hang out with sick sinners like us. Jesus, I pray that Mars Hill would always be a church with doors and arms wide open to welcome anyone and everyone. I pray our homes would be open. I pray that our lives would be open. I pray that our schedules would be open. I pray that our budgets would be open, so that we could welcome the people that you welcome and that they could be changed and that by being in community with them, we might be changed and saved from our own proclivity to religiosity and we ask for this grace, Lord Jesus, in your good name, Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.