

## Part 16: The Leper, The Lame Man, and Levi

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We have a home movie of Nehemiah when he was almost 3 and Ruthie wasn't even 2 yet – and they were arranging alphabet letters. And little Ruthie took the letter “U” and placed it upside down like an “N”. Well Nehemiah caught that rookie mistake right away. He was visibly annoyed. So being the gracious older brother and budding little genius that he was, he kept correcting her over and over saying “that’s an upside-down U” – “you made it an upside-down U”. He couldn’t even pronounce “upside down” correctly yet - but he knew the alphabet well enough to weaponize it and keep “little sister” in her place.

Now it’s so obvious when we see this in our kids that we can chuckle about it. But we don’t find it very funny in other people.

But what is it? Well it’s definitely pride, but it’s also a specific form of pride – what we call self-righteousness.

What do you think of when you imagine a self-righteous person?

Maybe the first thing that comes to mind is someone who’s legalistic, always being critical of other people.

Or maybe you think of someone who’s always defending themselves and never takes responsibility.

Maybe it’s someone who’s always comparing themselves with others to feel better about themselves.

If we’re honest we can probably find aspects of all of these things in ourselves. Everyone knows how easy it is to see hypocrisy in other people. But what’s the likelihood that no one looks at us that way?

You see what characterizes a self-righteous person is the belief that you don’t have a need – it’s kind of like self-sufficiency - you only have something to give away – and some people aren’t even worth giving something to.

And so at the heart of self-righteousness is that we don’t recognize our need. But the good news of Jesus begins with the bad news about us – that we are not righteous and we need help from outside of ourselves. Far from what self-righteousness tell us, we know there is something not right with us - we need a Savior.

And so in our passage today in the book of Luke we’re going to see that **Jesus restores those who acknowledge their need for him**. It’s those who humbly come to Jesus who find restoration in Jesus.

And we’re going to see three stories of restoration and in them we’ll see:

1. **The Willing Savior**
2. **The Forgiving Savior**
3. **The Calling Savior**

So we'll begin by looking at the Willing Savior.

### **The Willing Savior**

Let's start by reading **Luke 5:12**:

So leprosy in the Bible covers a wide range of skin diseases – some of them very contagious. And it says that the leper was “full of leprosy” so this may have been a particularly severe case. And the leper has heard about Jesus and doesn't doubt Jesus' ability to heal him. He calls him Lord which is at least an acknowledgement that Jesus has the authority to heal him and the right to choose whether or not he will heal him.

The leper knows how desperate his condition is. He knows that Jesus is his only hope. But the big question – the thing that the leper isn't sure of - is this: “Does Jesus care?” He *can* heal. But is he *willing* to heal?

We've all had lots of opportunities to pray for healing in the last few years. And for many of us when we pray we are certain that Jesus *can* heal, but as symptoms worsen and diseases progress we're left asking the same question – “Does Jesus care?”

Let's look at Jesus' response **in verse 13**:

So the leper goes from being “full of leprosy” to “immediately” being clean. Jesus not only had the *ability* to heal but proves he was *willing* to heal.

But Luke wants us to see something more. Look at how he mentions the detail that Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper. He could have just spoken and the leper would have been healed. In fact later in Luke we'll see him heal 10 lepers all at once without ever touching any of them. So why did he touch this leper?

Now in the Old Testament law, you had to stay in a state of being "clean" in order to enjoy being in the community of God's people and God's presence. But all of the purity laws made it clear that it was nearly impossible to stay in a state of cleanness. You were constantly coming in contact with things that would make you unclean. So uncleanness wasn't synonymous with sin but it was a live picture of how all of life is corrupted by sin and affects our relationship with God. We can't effectively clean ourselves up and make ourselves worthy to be in God's presence.

And lepers were always in a state of being unclean. They had to live alone and stay outside the camp. They had to live away from God's community and God's presence. And if someone touched a leper they themselves would be considered unclean as well – they too would be unfit to be amongst God's people in God's presence until they followed the laws to be considered clean again.

So when Jesus touched the leper, part of the miracle wasn't just that he healed the man but that Jesus didn't become unclean from touching him. Jesus' purity is so complete that he is not contaminated through contact but rather his purity transfers to the leper. It's like the contagion has been reversed - through contact with Jesus you actually catch purity.

So again we see something about Jesus' ability – in addition to his ability to heal, he also has the ability to touch a leper without becoming unclean. But again, why would he *want* to touch the leper?

One of the members of our church is a nurse in the ER at a hospital in town. And he's talked about how some of the homeless people he's helped have lived in such isolation that they haven't felt human touch in years. And so this nurse tries to take opportunities to show the warmth of a handshake or placing a hand on the shoulder - just letting them know that instead of being afraid or repulsed by them - they are valued and welcomed.

Jesus' touch communicated that *he* wasn't repulsed, *he* wasn't afraid. He wasn't just barely *willing* - he was compassionate, gracious, and very near. Jesus cares.

And Jesus touching uncleanness shouldn't surprise us when we think about how his entire incarnation was him throwing himself into the uncleanness of our world for the sake of our restoration.

Where in your life do you feel most isolated, most unclean? Where do you feel that Jesus reaching out to you would be like him touching a leper? Whatever rejection you've endured, however repulsive *you* may feel, Jesus is not only *able* to cleanse you - he wants you to feel his hand resting on your shoulder.

If Jesus is like this then we should draw near to him. The leper drew near to Jesus and Jesus drew nearer to him. Jesus is the one ready and able to bridge the impossible gap between you and him. Seek him and you will find that he is not far off.

So the leper is healed. And now we're going to see Jesus tell him to go *do* something. Let's **read verse 14:**

Now there's something really interesting here about the difference between what *Jesus* was able to do vs. what the *Law* could do. If you read through Leviticus, you'll find the word "leprosy" used 31 times. And yet despite everything it has to say about leprosy, the Law of Moses didn't have a single way to *heal* leprosy - it only had instructions for how to verify whether a leper wasn't a leper anymore. So Jesus did what the law had never been able to do when he healed a leper.

And so if the leper was already clean apart from the law, then why does Jesus tell him to go obey the law?

You see the leper still lacked one thing - by going to the priest and proving that he was clean, he would be restored back into the full fellowship of God's people and God's presence. So Jesus wasn't just concerned with the man's physical suffering. Jesus wanted the man's full restoration into God's community.

Now maybe you think becoming a Christian is all about cleaning your life up and obeying rules. But when Jesus restores you he doesn't begin by giving you a list of things to do, but instead a place to be. He wants us to be with him and to be with his people. All the obeying that he commands actually serves our belonging - it helps us love him and love his people. It helps us to draw deeper into his community.

And we're so individualistic that this can be really hard for us to get. Maybe you and community are like two magnets that can't decide whether to attract or repel one another. Sometimes the idea of

belonging is nice - but at least going it alone feels safer. But the God who is in himself community in trinity doesn't save us into self-sufficiency and autonomy. He saves us into his community.

### **Let's read verses 15-16:**

So Jesus' fame continues to spread. But Jesus prefers to withdraw instead of embracing his fame as a healer. And these things are clues that Jesus has different priorities than the crowds. And we're going to see this built out more in our next point: **The Forgiving Savior**.

### **The Forgiving Savior**

So let's continue reading starting in **verse 17-20**:

#### Jesus Forgives

Here we see another healing story, but did you see the difference in how Jesus is approached? Where last time the leper wasn't sure if Jesus was willing to heal, here the paralytic's friends don't have any doubt. There's all of these action words: "bringing", "seeking", "went up on the roof", "let him down through the roof" – they did whatever they needed to do to get their friend to Jesus.

And Jesus sees their faith. In fact this is the first time in the book of Luke that he *uses* the word "faith".

Faith isn't wishing for something hard enough that it comes true. It's not a mind-game where if I can imagine I already have something then I'll get it. It's not a commitment to a principle that everything works out in the end. Faith in the Bible is essentially trust in a person – its complete dependence on Jesus. And here they trusted Jesus. They were certain Jesus was the one who would help them.

Now at this point we would expect Jesus to heal the man, right? We just saw this happen with the leper. But just like the friends' conviction is different so is Jesus' response to them. Jesus does something that neither the crowds, the friends, or the Pharisees expected. He forgave the paralytic's sins.

Back in Luke chapter 1, Zechariah's prophecy had talked about salvation coming through the forgiveness of sins because of the tender mercies of God. And while we've already seen his tender mercy in saving a man from leprosy, now we see Jesus' tender mercy in saving the paralytic from his sins.

But why does Jesus prioritize forgiving the man's sins *instead* of healing him?

Have you ever had a surgery that didn't do anything to help your problem? Maybe either you or a friend went into surgery only for the doctors to realize that what they were looking for wasn't there. There was all this hope going into it that this would finally be the solution, but in the end it was the wrong diagnosis.

Or maybe you've had a shot in your back to take away pain but after a few weeks the pain comes right back. The shot was never going to fix the problem, it was only there to temporarily mask the problem – so that for a little while you could live like the injury wasn't there. But you knew all along that the shot was powerless to address the underlying issue.

Well our greatest problem is that we need forgiveness – that’s the correct diagnosis – that’s our underlying issue. And it just so happens that this is exactly the problem Jesus most wants to fix.

Jesus cares about suffering - most of all *eternal* suffering of separation from God. So the man’s paralysis is actually a parable of our own desperate situation in sin.

He had total paralysis – he couldn’t walk - he didn’t even say a word in the passage. The man who had to be carried is the one that best illustrates our total spiritual need for Jesus.

This is salvation beyond what the paralytic ever considered. He wanted saved off of his mat but Jesus saved him into right relationship with himself. Jesus isn’t content to give you a shot of temporary relief - he wants to take care of your underlying issue. He gives us what we didn’t even know was our greatest need – forgiveness and restoration to God.

Do you ever wrestle to believe that God is willing to forgive you? Do you have certain sins in your past that you keep asking God to forgive you for because you feel they’re just too big. Or maybe God’s reluctant to forgive – he’ll do it as a kind of transaction – but he’s not happy about it – he’s still frowning at you like a disappointed coach.

But we see here he’s *eager* to forgive - *he* wants it more than *you* do. His forgiveness might not compel you to come down through a roof, but it compelled him to come down into humanity. What is bad enough to make him reluctant to forgive you when you come to him for help? If you believe who Jesus really is then nothing can keep you from getting to him. In all of your spiritual paralysis just receive him.

### Jesus Forgives Because He is God

And right away we see the Pharisees response. Let’s **read verse 21**:

This passage is the first time that Luke mentions the scribes and Pharisees - and right away they have a conflict with Jesus. In verse 17 they had come from all over including Jerusalem. And as Jesus taught they were sitting there. It’s interesting that Luke doesn’t say they had come to listen or to hear but rather they had come to sit. It’s almost like he’s hinting that they came with a critical ear. They are important people from the most important places coming to assess Jesus’ teaching.

And when Jesus says that he forgives the paralytics’ sins, they rightly recognize that Jesus is claiming to do something only God can do. They consider the right question “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Now you might ask “why can only God forgive sins?” Don’t people forgive each other too? The Bible tells us to do that, right? But we have to remember that even though we do sin against each other, *all* sin is ultimately personally committed against God. Who God is determines what is good and evil. And he is the only one who can decisively forgive us for our offenses against *him*.

So when Jesus stands there and forgives the paralytics sins, he is claiming to embody all that God is that has been violated and offended by this man’s sin. He’s claiming to have authority to stand in for God on earth and declare that every one of this man’s sins have all been taken care of.

So by claiming to forgive sins, Jesus is claiming to be God. But he goes even further. We'll see in the next couple verses he refers to himself as "the Son of Man" who "has authority on earth to forgive sins".

This is the first time in Luke that Jesus uses this term for himself. And the last time Jesus will refer to himself as "the Son of Man" is at his trial where it is used against him to condemn him to death. Now sometimes the phrase "son of man" can just be another way of referring to a regular man – kind of like in our memory verse this week where it says that God is not "a son of man that he should change his mind." But it also can be a reference back to a vision in the book of Daniel where we see this divine yet human figure in heaven approaching the Father and being given authority over everything.

Let's read **Daniel chapter 7:13-14**:

Jesus comes right out and claims that he is the divine/human Son of Man come to earth with authority to forgive sins. He forgives because he is God.

And immediately, the Pharisees aren't buying it – whoever Jesus thinks he is, he is speaking blasphemy. And blasphemy is a crime worthy of death.

Remember that Luke is writing so that we can have certainty about the gospel message we've been taught. And one of the things that he has to show us is how it came to be that Jesus was rejected and killed by the Jews and then embraced by the Gentiles as their savior. Is it reasonable that Gentiles worship a rejected and executed Jewish teacher?

Luke wants to show us the evidence that Jesus *is* God and that his death on the cross was part of God's plan all along.

And it only takes five verses to go from introducing the religious leaders to them condemning Jesus for claiming to be God.

This passage starts the trajectory that will ultimately end in the cross. From the Pharisees' perspective, Jesus will be put to death for *claiming* to be the God who forgives. But ironically, Jesus gives himself up to die because he *is* the God who forgives. Jesus – the perfect God-man – dying to pay for our sins is precisely what makes forgiveness possible.

*Jesus Heals to Prove that He is the God Who Can Forgive*

So Jesus has claimed to be the God who can forgive sins, but now he's going to *prove* it.

Let's read **verses 22-26**:

Before Jesus even performs the miracle we see subtle evidence of his divinity. Did you notice that? He knows their thoughts – he knows what's going on in their hearts.

And doesn't that amaze you that he knows the faithlessness in the Pharisees' hearts and yet his response is to give them further reason to believe?

He heals the paralytic - and Luke uses that word "immediately" again. Like the leper, the paralytic's healing was instant and complete. The paralytic goes from having to be carried on a bed to carrying

the bed he had been confined to. The immediate nature of the healing shows us something about Jesus – that this wasn't hard for him to do. It proves that he is God and he can forgive sins.

So remember Jesus has identified that forgiveness was the man's greater problem. He prioritized it. And while the physical healing definitely demonstrated compassion, it was still secondary – it was meant to prove and direct us back to forgiveness.

And not only does Jesus have the *authority* to forgive sins, not only is Jesus *willing* to forgive sins, but in our passage he's the only one *desiring* forgiveness to take place. The Pharisees never expected God to care about sinners – the paralytic and his friends only expected him to heal the paralysis - but Jesus is God come for sinners – and he is *eager* to forgive.

And this is an important transition in our passage. Now we see that external healing is a picture of the spiritual healing he came to accomplish. The physical healings are a sign that the kingdom is breaking into our world – they are a bridge to the spiritual reality of forgiveness – they make it visible.

Now maybe you hear all of this but actually what's most difficult for you is not that Jesus would forgive you but why Jesus hasn't *healed* you. "I believe in Jesus – I know I'm forgiven. But if he can heal the leper and the paralytic, then how come he hasn't healed me?" The pain of what you've been through and what you're enduring right now might be so overwhelming that forgiveness just doesn't sound very helpful right now.

But if God has forgiven you then no matter how terminal your illness might be – you are promised resurrection life with Jesus for all eternity. Healing the paralytic pointed to the reality of God's kingdom – but forgiveness gets you *into* the kingdom and that's where we experience healing forever.

In talking about this with Tyler this past week he made the observation that – "for us the proof that our sins are forgiven is not a lame man walking but a dead man rising."

Jesus coming out of the grave proves our forgiveness and our future – one day we too will rise out of the grave. So being forgiven – far from being unhelpful to your healing – is the one thing that guarantees you *will* be healed. You will know life without pain in God's presence and with God's people forever.

And so now after showing Jesus' priority of forgiveness and proof that he is the God that forgives, Luke introduces the next section of our passage. And this is our third point: **The Calling Savior.**

### **The Calling Savior**

Let's read **verses 27-28:**

So in the previous passage Jesus called his first disciples: Peter, James, and John. And here we see the second time he calls someone to be his disciple, and it's Levi the tax collector. And Levi is the other name of Matthew the tax collector who wrote the book of Matthew – they are the same person – so we'll refer to him by both names today.

And unlike the miraculous catch of fish in the last passage, this time Jesus calling Matthew is pretty unremarkable. Jesus sees Matthew, tells him to follow him, and Matthew gets up and follows him. On the surface there's nothing very miraculous or special about it.

Have you ever wished that you had a better conversion story? Well on the surface Matthew's three sentence experience sounds pretty unimpressive too. But just like with any of our testimonies there's something miraculous happening here.

First notice that there's something different compared to the last two stories we just read. Jesus sees *Matthew*. The leper had seen *Jesus* and had faith he could heal him. The friends of the paralytic had *heard* of Jesus and got their friend to him. But Matthew is the only one in our passage who Jesus *calls* to himself. The others were motivated to come to Jesus for physical healing, but Matthew – who's just sitting there – comes because Jesus calls him.

And this is what makes this short account so remarkable. *Who* did Jesus call? A tax collector is the last person we should expect. They were on the farthest fringes of society. Maybe the only thing worse than the occupying Romans were tax collectors because they were traitors. They aligned themselves with Rome against their own people in order to extort their people for personal gain. And the detail that Matthew is sitting "in his tax booth" means that at that moment he was still committed to that way of life.

So Jesus isn't calling the best and brightest with the most potential. First he picked fishermen and now he's calling a corrupt and hated tax collector. Why would he choose this sinner?

Well the answer is actually found in why Matthew followed him. It doesn't say much – just that he was sitting there and Jesus called him. Peter followed him after seeing something miraculous and realizing he was unworthy of Jesus – but the miraculous thing that Matthew saw was Jesus looking at him saying "follow me". No one had to convince Matthew that he was unworthy – he knew very well who he was and what he'd done and what the rest of his people thought about him. And it was in his understanding of his unworthiness – his need – that all it took was Jesus' call and he was in. Matthew saw a miracle too, but this time it was the miracle that Jesus would call *him*.

And this is what gives us hope in evangelism. When you believe in a sovereign God that saves, it could be a temptation to think that that's a deterrent to evangelism. Like "well God has already chosen who is and isn't going to get saved, so it's no use evangelizing someone he hasn't chosen and if he has chosen someone then he'll save him regardless of if I evangelize him."

But the hope in evangelism is the irresistible call of Jesus. When Jesus chooses to call someone they respond. You never know where you'll be or what you'll be doing when Jesus chooses to use you as the means of calling someone to himself. Don't you want to be a part of that?

Now Jesus calling the outcast in society is something that our culture would typically be approving of. The culture we live in is very affirming of you if you are in the minority or on the fringes of society. We often view labels as a badge of honor – what makes us different is also what makes us special. So our culture loves the call to come as you are. But with Jesus the call is to come as you are but not to stay that way.

Read the second half of **verse 27 and verse 28** again.

Jesus calling Matthew wasn't Matthew's vindication – it was grace. It was a call to change direction – a call away from something. Where Matthew had been sitting as a tax collector he had to rise and follow

Jesus. Matthew – just like Peter, James, and John – leaves everything behind. He just gave up his career – his source of income – his identity as a tax collector. He makes a commitment that there's no coming back from. Matthew the tax collector has become Matthew the follower of Jesus. This is an entirely new identity – a new way of life.

What do you need to cut yourself off from to truly be devoted to Jesus? What things in your life prevent you from really following him? Matthew couldn't keep being a tax-collector on the side. You have to heed Jesus' call and change direction. Some things have got to go – and other things get repurposed into the service of Jesus.

And this leads into the next few verses where we see Matthew doing this very thing. Let's **read verse 29:**

So how many of you celebrate becoming unemployed by hosting a feast? This was definitely the most expensive celebration Matthew ever put on because there's no recoupling the cost of this meal. But Matthew uses what he has in the service of Jesus. And we see this point throughout the book of Luke. Luke wants us to see finances as a commodity for the kingdom. When we follow Jesus we use our finances to honor Jesus and draw others to him.

And so Matthew reaches out to his contacts – other tax collectors and people on the fringes of society and he invites them to dinner so that they can meet Jesus. He wants others to share in his joy of following Jesus.

And this fits with the view of discipleship that we've already been introduced to. Remember when Jesus called his first disciples – Peter, James, and John – the only thing they know about discipleship with Jesus is that they will be “catching men”. Well the “large catch” in Peter's boat is parallel with this “large company” in Matthew's house of tax collectors and other outsiders. Matthew's first action as a follower of Jesus is to start “catching men” by inviting them to dinner in Jesus' honor.

And Matthew is positioned perfectly to reach this crowd of sketchy people. The tax collectors know that Matthew is safe because he's one of them, and Matthew testifies that Jesus is safe – but not because *he's* just like one of them but because he's *calling* them.

Who are you perfectly positioned to reach out to? Sometimes we listen to sermons and podcasts and blogs and feel like there are a million things that we're supposed to be involved in and doing in order to be a good Christian. You should be on the board for your homeowners' association and you should be serving at a food bank and you should be going on a mission trip and you should be doing street evangelism, and more and more. Discouragement might even leave you doing none of those things. But sometimes we just need to start by realizing who's already around us and just asking them to join you for dinner.

There are a couple of kids in our neighborhood who come over and play with our kids all the time. And their parents aren't believers, but we've invited their kids to join us for dinner and devotions and their parents have given them permission to stay. So after dinner they'll often sit and sing songs with us and follow along in the Bible and join us in prayer. After devotions one night Patty said “do you realize that we just got to see an 11 year old read from the bible for the first time?” It was so simple and natural to invite them into what we were already doing – but do see what a privilege that is?

It doesn't have to be a party for a large company – it can just be whatever you were already planning for dinner that night, but keep your eyes open for who you might introduce to Jesus.

Just as the paralytic's friends had done whatever they could to get the paralytic to Jesus for physical healing now Matthew is doing what he can to get his former circle of friends to Jesus for a different kind of healing.

But this also occasions the second conflict with the scribes and Pharisees. Let's **read verse 30**:

So the Pharisees don't actually talk directly to Jesus. But they've moved from thinking their objections in their heads to vocalizing their objections to the disciples. So things are slowly escalating. And they are upset that Jesus and his disciples are sharing a meal with tax collectors and sinners. Note that Luke just referred to them as tax collectors and "others" but the Pharisees call these "others" "sinners". So whatever made these people outsiders – whether they were prostitutes or had diseases like the leper, the Pharisees assessment was that they were all ritually and morally unclean. And no devout Jew would ever defile himself by associating with them. So Jesus needs to explain himself.

So where the first conflict came over Jesus doing something too high for a man – in forgiving sins – now they accuse Jesus of doing something beneath a righteous man – associating with sinners. They can't fathom Jesus being elevated to do what only God can do (in forgiving sins) and they can't fathom God condescending to what Jesus is doing right now (in associating with the lowly).

But Jesus isn't intimidated by sketchy people and shady characters. He wasn't made unclean by touching the leper and he isn't made unclean by eating with sinners.

Now he doesn't join them or affirm them in sinful practices and immorality – instead he's inviting them to himself and the kind of change that we've already begun to see in Matthew.

And this is challenging to how we think about unbelievers – especially those who are different from us. Where do you have a tendency to not associate or wrongly associate with people who don't follow Jesus? We don't like to admit it, but for many of us there's some significant prejudice we'd have to overcome to interact with the "unclean" of our day. Where does either the Black Lives Matter or Trump 2024 sign on your neighbors' lawn suggest to you that that neighbor is "unclean"? Would it be uncomfortable for you to share a meal with a neighbor who is in a different income bracket, or a different stage of life, or has a disability? Where do you not want to deal with people who don't look like you?

On the other hand maybe it comes easy to you to hang out with unbelievers. You drink freely with them at the brewery and laugh with them about their favorite show. And maybe you feel like you're a great example of Jesus in this passage.

But are you wrongly associating with sinners? Jesus was distinct from sinners even as he ate with them because he was sinless. He never affirmed or joined them in sin – his time with them was all about calling them to himself. So ask yourself, am I engaging sinners without engaging in sin? Am I loving them by helping them see their greatest need?

Now let's read Jesus' response to the Pharisees in **verses 31-32**:

Here is the punch-line of our entire passage. Jesus' answer shows us that we have just witnessed a live parable in the leper, the lame man, and Levi. Who was sick in our passage? The leper needed a physician. The paralytic needed a physician. They knew they had a need – they recognized they needed Jesus – and they humbly came to Jesus for help. But even with the paralytic we saw a transition taking place – the priority of forgiveness – that is our greatest need and Jesus is the solution for it. The two needs of the sick got us to the healthy sinner – the tax collector, Matthew. The two sick men who know they have a physical need set us up for the sinful man who knows he's got a spiritual need – and Jesus calls him to repentance.

And when Jesus says he doesn't call the righteous but sinners, does that mean that there are righteous people who don't need Jesus? Should the Pharisees be flattered? "We're the righteous ones, it's the really bad people who need Jesus to straighten them out." But no, this isn't a compliment to the Pharisees – instead it is an indictment. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous because there are no righteous people except for him. But it's only those who humbly acknowledge their need for Jesus that come to Jesus.

How do you know that you're right with God? Maybe you're known for being a person of integrity - you try to do good things and just trust you've lived a good enough life. Or maybe you're known for being very religious and it might even be frustrating that it's hard to find a Christian friend who's as serious about their faith as you. But we have to realize that what makes us worthy of Jesus is seeing how unworthy we are.

You see the Pharisees can't stand sick people because they think they are healthy. But if you don't acknowledge that *you're* sick too then you'll never come to the physician. But whatever else you trust in to make you okay with God, it's like taking ibuprofen and thinking it'll fix cancer. Jesus is the only Savior. But he has nothing to offer the self-righteous because they think they've taken care of their problem themselves.

One time I was going to a physical therapist, and I got to know him over several months. And you know what it's like when you get to know someone and care about them and just want them to know Jesus. But he really wasn't interested. And I think in his experience Christians could be pushy. So I wanted to try to help him understand how love rather than self-righteousness was what motivated me to talk about Jesus. I said something like, "I'm sure that as a physical therapist, there's a lot of people that you observe living with pain from bad posture or injuries and you know that you could help them but they won't acknowledge they have a problem." He got what I was saying, and he chuckled. You see he didn't recognize that he had a problem so he couldn't see the love and grace of Jesus in what I had to offer.

We come empty and needy to Jesus or we don't come to him at all.

Let's reread **verse 32**:

So we've looked at the call to sinners. But what are sinners called to? A call to follow Jesus is a call to repentance. Now Jesus doesn't build out a doctrine of repentance here, but he doesn't have to. We've already started to see what repentance looks like, haven't we? We're starting to get an idea of repentance in how Matthew has begun following Jesus.

Repentance is a change in direction. Everyone changes direction in our passage. The leper changes direction to go show himself to the priest. The lame man changes direction to walking home with his bed. Matthew goes from sitting at his tax booth to hosting a feast for Jesus in his home. Matthew experiences an inner repentance that leads to a change of direction for his whole life. Jesus calls us to a holy, different life.

And this life involves community. Before we saw how Jesus wanted the leper to be restored to the covenant community. But here Jesus is building a new community – and it's made up of everyone who responds to his call by repenting and following him.

And part of how we live out repentance in Jesus' community is by staying in our recognition of need for him and not drifting back into self-righteousness.

I worked in retail for a number of years and I really tried to be a witness for Jesus at my job. But years went by without much fruit and at one point I was really discouraged by my coworkers. I was grieved by their love for the world and lack of interest in Jesus. And it really made me withdrawn, self-pitying, and angry. I felt justified for feeling that way because I was sure that God felt this way about these people too.

One of my coworkers was a struggling Christian that I'd tried to encourage on many occasions. And one day she came up to me and asked me if I cared about my witness anymore. I had this strange feeling that God was using this moment to get through to me. My coworker told me my attitude was just destroying my witness. It was really humbling to be put in my place – I had always been the super-Christian – but here I was being corrected by one of the people whose progress had discouraged me.

My problem, and the reason my heart was hard towards my coworkers, was that I was being self-righteous. God had to humble me because I wasn't humbled by his mercy meeting me in my greatest need. I was all about my performance and forgot that my worth came from Jesus' grace in the midst of my unworthiness. And when I stopped seeing my need for Jesus I stopped loving others with his love.

But isn't it an amazing relief to know that Jesus came for sinners? You may not know all the ins and outs of what Jesus would have you do but you know enough to start changing direction towards him. Never stop recognizing your need for Jesus – come to the Jesus that is willing, forgiving, and calling.