



“Missional Living”
Luke 5:29-32

Idea: The believer who has tasted the grace of God does not want to go to heaven alone.

Intro: Blessed to share. One of the greatest lessons we can learn as believers and followers of Jesus Christ is that the Lord blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others. Are you sharing the good that you have with those who are in desperate need of it?

For the last three or four years, as a church we have been reading through the Bible annually together. Many of you have participated in this endeavor. Therefore, if you are following our reading plan this year, then on Friday you read the story I am about to share. Tucked way back in 2 Kings 7 is a fascinating story involving four lepers. These men were suffering the effects of a famine, which had come over the land of Samaria. The people of Israel were under the judgment of God. The Kingdom of Israel had been split in two under Rehoboam, Solomon’s son. At that time, Jeroboam led the ten northern tribes away and set up a rival kingdom. He even set up a rival form of worship. He made two golden calves for sacrifice and set them up in Dan and in Bethel (1 Kings 12). If you travel with me to Israel the next time we go, I can take you to the very place where the golden calf was set up in Dan. The location is almost in Lebanon. It is about a mile long hike through the woods in a national park. There is an ongoing archeological dig taking place, which has uncovered the very platform upon which Jeroboam set that golden calf and the altar where the sacrifices were offered.

The judgment of God had come upon the northern kingdom because of their idolatry. God had caused a famine to sweep over the land, and the people were nearly starving to death (2 Kings 6). He also sent Ben-hadad and the Syrians to lay siege to the capitol city of Samaria. They cut off everything coming in and going out. Therefore, the people were driven to the point of starvation. It was so bad that they were eating the heads of donkeys and doves’ dung. Two women were so desperate that they decided to eat their own sons. The situation was equally dire for the lepers who lived outside the city walls. Four of those lepers decided to go over to the camp of the Syrians. They thought, “Perhaps the Syrians will be gracious to us.” Death faced them no matter where they went.

In the evening they went over to the camp and found it deserted. As we read this, we are reminded that no matter how bad the situation may be, God always loves His people. During that day God had delivered His people. He caused it to thunder, and He caused the Syrians to interpret the thunder as the sound of chariots and horses. They heard the noise and thought the Israelites had hired the Hittites and Egyptians to fight against them, so in their fear they left everything and fled back to Syria.

The lepers entered the vacant camp. In it they found food, silver, gold, and clothing. They had hit the jackpot, so they feasted and filled their bellies. Then, the four men carried off the silver, gold, and clothing. They hid

the items and came back for more. As they were doing this, the men began to realize that this was not good. They were experiencing the goodness of God. They had good news to tell, and their people back in Damascus needed to hear what the Lord had done for them.

Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household." – 2 Kings 7:9

This story reminds those of us who have experienced the goodness of God of the necessity to share the news of this goodness with others. We dare not keep it to ourselves. Doing so would not be right. Instead, we want and must share it with those who are in desperate need of hearing it. Such is the case for Levi. He has experienced the grace of Jesus Christ, so he immediately shares it with his friends and family.

Read Luke 5:29-32.

Inquiry: As we have already seen in Luke 5, the only one changed by Jesus in the healing of the paralytic was the man who had been paralyzed. The Pharisees, teachers of the Law, and the others who observed that miracle were amazed and glorified God, but they were not drawn to the Lord Jesus as the man was. Verse 27 begins with the phrase *"after this."* Luke is making the point that after the holy men failed to realize that the greatest need in their lives was the same as the paralytic, Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi, and He called this unlikely candidate to follow Him. The Lord demonstrated His commitment to missional living by taking His good news to this tax collector.

Likewise, Levi demonstrated a commitment to missional living. This despised sinner who had tasted the grace of God threw a party to celebrate and introduce others to Jesus. His actions teach us that the believer who has tasted the grace of God does not want to go to heaven alone. He provides a fresh perspective on missional living. There are three viewpoints of missional living on display in these verses.

The believer who is living missionally:

1. Intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently takes the gospel to sinners.

This is a phrase that we have been using in our church for several years. It rightly portrays how Christ-followers should approach living in a fallen world. Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, and the other Great Commission passages give the marching orders for the local church. We are to passionately tell others the Good News. Telling the Good News of Jesus is our passion because His passion for us took the Lord to the cross.

When a man, a woman, or a child finds acceptance with the Lord, that new believer naturally wants to celebrate. The individual who has tasted of the Lord's goodness wants his or her friends and family to find in Jesus what he or she found. For this reason, Levi threw a party. He intentionally invited his tax collector colleagues. He intentionally thought through his list of friends in need of salvation.

As Levi considered his list of lost and sinful friends, he strategically considered options for engaging them. He wondered what the best approach might be to reach them with the gospel. Apparently, the best way to share the Good News with them was by way of a retirement dinner. In that setting he could share the *what* and *why* of his lifestyle change, and he could introduce them to Jesus.

The dinner was a creative but ordinary way to share the gospel. It was routine. People like to celebrate, so his friends were sure to attend. More than anything, we need to recognize Levi's urgency in the dinner. Luke gives us the impression that Levi did not waste any time.

As you seek to live missionally as a believer, are you intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently sharing the gospel with your sinful friends and a sinful world? I am purposely using the adjective “sinful” because we must never forget that everyone is a sinner (Rom 3:23). People may be religious and appear to be good, but the reality is everyone is born into sin and under the condemnation of their sin. Everyone needs a Savior. For this reason, those of us who have tasted the goodness of Jesus should intentionally, strategically, creatively, and urgently seek to take the gospel to all people in all places. It begins with those who live next door and moves out to the nations.

What should this look like in your life today?
There is a second viewpoint.

2. Understands that separation does not mean isolation.

Jesus clearly had transformed Levi’s life. He left everything and followed Jesus. This description means there was a distinct break in his lifestyle. It does not mean, however, that he forsook his former colleagues and friends, which is evident by the party he threw.

The Pharisees and scribes grumbled over this party and Jesus’ attendance. They held to the belief that holiness requires one to completely separate from the sinful. On one level, this understanding is true. Just as darkness is separated from the light, man’s sinfulness separates him from the holiness of God. On another level, however, we constantly read in the Bible of the holiness of God pursuing man in his sin. For example, it is God who comes down to Eden after Adam and Eve had rebelled. He called out and redeemed them (Gen 3). The Apostle Paul understood this truth. He spent himself living on mission for the sake of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul clearly understood that his life had been separated unto holiness and the pursuit of knowing Christ. Yet, his separation did not mean isolation from sinners. He clarified this perspective to the Corinthians.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler— not even to eat with such a one. – 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

Paul’s call for separation was not between the Christian and the non-Christian. His call for separation was between the Christian who is pursuing Christ and the “Christian” who is pursuing sin. Let’s take a lesson from Levi today. He opened his home to sinful people. He engaged them where they were and introduced them to Jesus. This means we too should cultivate relationships with non-Christians and engage them where they are. As we seek to do so, let’s keep two things in mind:

- Know your limits and temptations.
If you are easily tempted with alcohol, do not go to the bar with your coworkers after work. You should avoid any setting that gives room for the devil to lead you astray and harm your testimony.
- Keep a redemptive purpose and goal in mind.
You are not going into the world simply to hang out with worldly people. No, it is an intentional, strategic, creative, and urgent work. It is not a license to live worldly.

How does this look like in your life and home?

Missional living calls for separation without isolation. Unfortunately, this distinction requires a third viewpoint.

3. Expects to be misunderstood by the religious.

Just as the Pharisees and scribes grumbled over Jesus attending Levi's party, religious people will fuss about our perceived worldliness. They will not understand our intentional and urgent desires to engage sinners where they are. Instead, they will expect and demand that we isolate ourselves from sinners. Our evangelistic methods will not fit their forms and paradigms. Levi adds an additional statement from Jesus in his gospel.

¹²But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." – Matthew 9:12-13

The Lord is much more concerned with sinners being transformed into worshipers than He is the form of worship. In other words, Jesus does not care about how a sinner looks, speaks, or acts. He expects sinners to be sinful. Again, Jesus did not require Levi to clean himself up before experiencing His redemption. The opposite was true. Jesus only required him to acknowledge his sin and to turn from it. All throughout the New Testament, when people ask what they are to do with Jesus, the answer is always for them to repent of their sin and receive His forgiveness and redemption. They are not required to fix themselves. Therefore, we dare not fall into the trap of requiring that sinners appear to be Christian before we engage them with the Good News.

This means that we are going to go to sinful people where they live, work, and play in their sin. It also means that when God brings sinners into our gathered times of worship and instruction, we are not going to require them to look or act a certain way. For this reason, we do not put any emphasis on dressing a certain way for worship. We want people to come as they are.

Conclusion: Four lepers, four outcasts, fled to the Syrian camp in a last-ditch effort to save their lives from the ravages of famine. Upon arrival they found so much more than they ever imagined. Their enemy had been defeated and had fled. There in the camp laying all around them was food, goods, and clothing. The God of Israel had graciously worked a miracle for them. He had demonstrated His great love, and they were overwhelmed by His blessing. It was so wonderful, they could not possibly keep it to themselves, so they quickly carried the good news back to their people. They had to share it with others.

Levi, also, had experienced the gracious and loving touch of God. Jesus' eyes saw all that he was, yet the Lord was not turned away by Levi's sin. Jesus called out and welcomed Levi to Himself. In response to such amazing grace, the tax collector quickly carried this good news to his friends and colleagues. He had to share it with others.

These men demonstrate missional living. They show us what ought to be present in our lives as believers and followers of Christ. There should be an intentional, strategic, creative, and urgent commitment to the gospel. There should be a commitment to separation without isolation. And there should be an expectation that religious people may misunderstand our commitment to the gospel.

As Christians we are to live on mission because Jesus lived on mission. His mission brought us into relationship with Him. Jesus pursued us just as He is pursuing many here today. If you are not in relationship with Him, there is some news I want you to know.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord.

Do you need to be forgiven? Maybe you feel like an outcast or that you have sinned beyond the scope of forgiveness. Levi's story makes it clear that Jesus' reach is wide.

Jesus knows everything about you. He has assessed your life and knows your sin. In the face of your sin, He has also issued a call. Will you today decide to follow Him?