

Luke 5:17-6:11

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[0 : 00] On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles, into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, Man, your sins are forgiven.

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, Why do you question in your hearts?

Which is easier, to say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Rise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[1 : 04] He said to the man who was paralyzed, I say to you, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home. And immediately he rose up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God.

And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, We have seen extraordinary things today. After this he went on 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. 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.

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. And they said to him, The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.

[2 : 15] And Jesus said to them, Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

He also told them a parable. No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine, desires new, for he says, The old is good. On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those with him?

[3 : 29] And he said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And a man was there, whose right hand was withered.

And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man

with the withered hand, Come and stand here.

And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?

And after looking around at them all, he said to him, Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury, and discussed with one another, what they might do to Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, a lengthy reading, but a very simple structure. [4 : 44] Four scenes. The first two take place in separate homes. The other two on separate Sabbath days.

In all four, Jesus and his radical call for change.

And in all four, the Pharisees, and their resistant challenge to him.

Luke is intent, by this point in the text, to show you and me once for all that Jesus intends to upset the status quo of an entire era.

When it comes to creating a period piece, a script writer of a movie, or one who's writing literature in a literary narrative, they learn to tell their story early on in a way that establishes the integrity of an entire era with the everydayness of life.

[6 : 08] So, they allow you, the onlooker, or reader, to enter into, normally, what is a very ordinary life, or lives of people, doing very ordinary things, in ways that establish for you the believability of the whole.

Done well, narratives, movies, like this, they recreate for you and me a whole world that previously was unknown to us.

And we adopt it as true. Luke does this very thing. In five and a half chapters, the short space of time, he's created for the reader by this moment a realistic picture of what Jewish religious life looked like before Jesus came upon the scene.

And believe me, in our text today, he is here. He comes upon the scene. But by the time we arrive, he has subtly positioned us in the everydayness of Jewish religious life in the first century.

And he did it with three temple scenes in Jerusalem, set out in the very early going, followed up by three synagogue scenes that are in out-of-the-way places, and taken together, when you arrive at 517, you already know what Jewish religious practice looked like before Jesus burst onto the scene and imaginatively informed you about where he would take it.

[7 : 55] Let me just refresh your memory. The work opened with a very ordinary, appearing Jewish man walking into Jerusalem to perform his duties as a priest at the temple.

His wife was barren, but by his way of life, Luke has indicated that God's people were freely going about their worship in ways that the world of Rome found rather unobtrusive.

Later, Luke brings you to the temple again. But this time, it was through the lens of a young mother named Mary. She's there with her newly-wed husband offering two turtle doves, indicating to you and to me that on the day of her infant son's circumcision, she's an ordinary, impoverished woman who is free to worship God according to the dictates of her conscience.

And there in the background was an elderly man, Simeon, and an aged woman, Anna, that let you understand that life was about the ordinary routine of things.

They were there as they had always been there, worshipping God. The third temple scene confirmed that God's people were free to live without any interference.

[9 : 24] There was no fear of assembling in that day. Jesus was 12. It was an annual festival. He'd come once a year and he was there again.

And all the old men appeared to be doing what the old men do, even in Hyde Park today at Valois, sitting through the day content with discussion on a variety of texts or issues.

Three temple scenes that let you know what everyday religious life looked like. Followed in the upper rural countryside, though, with synagogue scenes that only reinforced that by the time Jesus arrives on the scene, there was a pervasiveness of religious piety that existed at the time of Christ. You're brought into a synagogue in a small rural village called Nazareth, a place where there were scrolls that had been copied and written down and were opened weekly.

And even Jesus, who seems to be a periodic or visitor almost, is free to expound his understanding in discussion on text.

[10 : 42] Also ordinary and informal. Nearby Capernaum, the next synagogue scene, the same way of life is depicted so that by the time you and I arrive at 444 of Luke's text, which is the third

mention of life in the synagogue, it seems to indicate that what was true of Nazareth and Capernaum was true of nearly every village or town in first century Palestine.

The rule of Rome had done nothing to squash out the religious life of God's people. Inner testamental worship was alive, it was doing well, and we've seen it through the everydayness of life. We have walked with ordinary people doing ordinary things in ways that establish for you and for me a believable way of life.

Sabbath, weekly, rhythms of worship appear in the text in settled form. Their life was much like yours.

Their freedom to assemble seems to be accepted at large. And there was evidently this interconnectedness of fluid relationships that united the whole tapestry of Jewish life between Jerusalem at its center all the way to the outskirts.

[12:14] this is what Luke has portrayed for you. Jewish religious life at the time of Christ was in some measure a prosperous and in a contented state before his own teachings and miracles stir the waters of change.

And believe me, our text today he is all about change. Four scenes.

The first two in separate homes. The latter two on separate Sabbath days. The first scene, the owner of the home we are not told, but there he is and according to verse 17, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were there.

Notice, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The waters have been stirred, the reports have been swirling, the normal activities of religious leaders rising in their own city and discussing texts with their own neighbors is now over.

they've left their places and from all over there's an interest in the itinerant one. Jesus, the Nazarene and have you heard?

[13:54] Have you been there for yourself? And by now they're gathering. The days of social media long before we invented it.

the keepers of the gate, here they are, all present for the first time in Luke. The conventional way of religious life, already disrupted, and here comes the lowering of a paralytic.

What a moment that must have been. I can think that if you had been there and the thatched roof began to give way and the kind of porous clay began to fall and the hole emerged and the skylight actually opened with light and down he comes.

You would have thought you had the best ticket in town. Unbelievable. Were you there? They were there. Such is the beautiful faith of those who know that Christ had come to make men and women well.

And down he comes. The most surprising words of all, though, in this narrative are the first words of Jesus, aren't they? When he saw their faith, he said, man, verse 20, your sins are forgiven you.

[15:39] Not the words we expect first, not that we don't expect them at all, but we did notice a few weeks ago that Luke 4 attaches liberty in ways that are expansive to our understanding, and Jesus claimed here first, my dear son, I've come to make you well.

your sins are forgiven. A strange thing to say to somebody that needs a gurney to get around.

The question then comes from the scribes and Pharisees, and you'll notice in each of the scenes, they resist his work. They began to question, saying, who is this who speaks blasphemy, who can forgive sins but God alone?

They question his authority to forgive sins. Now, some portrait of the Pharisees needs to be put before you. This is the first time they appear and they will run throughout the remainder of Luke's text.

Who were the Pharisees? Well, simply by language, if you take the term in its kind of linguistic connections to Hebrew, it would be associated with a word where one was a separatist.

[17:16] What they were separate from, well, that you'd have to figure out, was that they were separate from the people, they wanted to be separate from the common man, the man on the street, were they separate?

separated from non-Jewish ways of worship, but they had been known as a core unto themselves. By the time of Christ, according to Josephus, which we begin to parallel time periods, there might have been as many as about 6,000 of self-professed Pharisees.

Who were they? Well, according to Josephus, we learn much. They were religious practitioners of the highest order. They had great respect for the Hebrew Testament, for the text, for the Torah, and

not only for the text and its interpretation and its discussion on what it meant, but these were those who were committed to living under the Word.

They were Word people who wanted to walk their talk. They were committed to the walk. And so they were committed to forms of purity, and they maintained piety, and let me tell you what it looked like.

[18 : 35] They often prayed. They gave regularly of their money to the poor, almsgiving being the chief sign of religious piety.

they were connected to walking out what their understanding of Hebrew faith indicated.

They actually went beyond that and began to live rigorously under their own applications and interpretations. Luke's going to go on to portray them as those in the coming chapters who didn't submit themselves, though, to John's baptism, which is an indication that while they were religiously committed, they did not really think they needed what the masses needed, namely preparation for the kingdom.

They were already walking in the ways of the kingdom. No, John's baptism of repentance, that we can forego. We'll also learn, even in our own text, that they were opposed to Jesus in increasing ways.

They would not live under the rule of this one. Luke will say that in contrast to others, they justified themselves before God while others waited for God to justify them.

[20 : 08] They viewed themselves as in a decent relationship with God, based primarily on their commitment to the word and their walk through life. So, where they saw others entering church in abysmal states of life, they would indeed say, dear God, I am thankful that you have kept me from living such a debauched life like that.

God. Well, it seems that we should at least acknowledge there is some distinction between the Pharisees and those who love Christ and try to walk under his ways.

The Pharisee, really, the parallel is they are a religious person, a religious person who is concerned with biblical texts, but their concern for biblical text does not require personal repentance or submission to Jesus.

They were most likely culturally refined people, financially vested in the poor, routinely given to prayer, and in some way believed that God looked on them favorably for it.

Most likely, they were earnest folk, bent on viewing lavish meals, the kind of which we'll see by Levi later as somehow misplaced or inappropriate funds that could have been better spent in more useful ways.

[21 : 43] Well, here they are, and they question the audacity of Jesus concerning his claim that he can forgive sins. They resist the idea that this new upstart itinerant has the authority to absolve sins.

to which Jesus responds in wowing fashion. I love what he does. Why do you question in your hearts the change that I've come to bring concerning the impoverished souls of men and women and their relationship to God?

Which is easier? To say that? or to say rise, take up your pallet and walk? Well, the implication, of course, it's a lot easier to say you can forgive sins, but to do it would be another matter.

But in order that you might know that I can do the more difficult thing, restore this man's relationship with God, I will tell you, rise, take up your pallet and walk.

And he did. Jesus wowing the masses.

[23 : 00] What a scene. And what a challenge to both ends of today's Protestant perspective. I don't know which way you enter these stories, but no matter which way you get in, sooner or later he looks you in the eye and calls you up short.

At least he does for me. To those who would confine themselves on a text like this, to the work of Christ, that confines it in a sense to conversion or the forgiveness of sins, well, Jesus did say rise, take up your pallet and walk.

To those who would confer the priority of Christ merely to the street credibility of meeting someone's physical needs, well, Jesus did indicate his priority of mission to forgive sins.

And there it is. Both ends. Just like the explication of the law itself. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

And in Jesus, they always come together. Scene two. No longer the raising of the paralytic, but reclining with a tax collector, 27 through 39.

[24 : 31] There's so much here to like about Jesus. Jesus. He finds a man named Levi and calls him to himself, indicative, I suppose, of what we saw with Peter earlier, that Levi had had some personal exposure to him in ways that almost allowed for this.

And so Levi rises from behind his booth and look, verse 29, takes him home and prepares a great feast.

And look, what a party. This is a great community group dinner. A large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with him. This is no Zacchaeus, you know, who didn't seem to have any friends.

No, it looked like the action among the tax collectors, well, Levi, he was the house that everybody went to. This was the guy, you know, the big screen was on at Levi's house.

Always a good spread. I remember these days when you're in junior high and high school and college, you knew whose home to go to and who's not to go to.

[25 : 48] You knew whose cupboards were full of the things you wanted and the homes where there was nothing there to eat. Well, Levi's home was fully stocked.

and they like to gather. In our community group last week, Andrew Clement made an interesting observation.

He said, you know, it's interesting, this week we've seen that Jesus called Peter from his nets. In other words, he produced followers from those whose occupations required them to take a shower after they went to work.

work. But now, with Levi, he's going to indicate his ability to make followers of those who had to take a shower before they went to work. He's on Fulton Street with fresh fish, and he's on LaSalle Street among the bankers.

And he's finding followers from both cores. He is reaching the common man and, get this, the opportunistic capitalist.

[27 : 06] And they'll both lead for him. I find that ironic. he forges followers from among the ranks of sinners.

Well, the challenge is there for us then, isn't it? There are those in our midst, of course, who would like to look at this vignette and only appeal to verse 32.

I've come not to call the righteous, but sinners, and then we would land on to repentance. Notice, he calls people to repent, sinners to repent. And the other end, of course, rightly acknowledging, look who he's at table with.

He's reclining with sinners. sinners. There is a form of religion here in Hyde Park where we can be pharisaical by thinking that the opportunistic capitalists are the ones that if God were to show up, he would judge most completely and condemn that this story washes away and says, no, even from there, Jesus came today, he'd find himself, perhaps, at times, in the oyster bars of Wall Street among those who had made a killing on the common man and taking from among them a man who would live and lead for him.

it's true. The other end is equally true. He calls all those people to repent.

[29 : 23] Notice, it isn't merely where Jesus is, it's what he's doing where he is. There is an element that Jesus challenges all of us.

I think of the insidious irony that is present in kind of soft core Protestantism that trumpets with a loud voice, Jesus is at table with sinners, while never demanding change among those with whom he is seated.

As if Jesus embraces all kinds and any kind of moral laxity or covetousness or greed.

He doesn't. the notion that all moral code is irrelevant under Jesus who loves the sinner.

No. He's walked into my life, he walks into your life, and the immediate thing he does is he changes our lives. And the opportunistic capitalist repents.

[30 : 54] And the soft sinner whose lax steps up. We find our way under the rightful rule of Jesus.

The Pharisees are there though, aren't they? There's the question again, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? You see, the Pharisees wanted to separate themselves from those who did not know Christ.

Is it true of you, of me? Who are we at table with? Well, Jesus says, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Two tables. It's interesting to me how 33, while the English text separates it from the one before, actually is a continuation of the discussion that was ongoing.

They said to him, the disciples of John fast often and often prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink. In other words, they've made their way from one home to the other, and they see the big spread, but they're not really wanting to partake of things.

[32 : 12] It doesn't square with them. This opulence, this large meal, this extravagance, this free-flowing fluids, open bar, doesn't square.

They're like, well, John's guys were more rigorous. They wouldn't have done this. Our guys are more rigorous. They wouldn't do this. Why do your guys do this? Jesus gives them a parable to answer the question.

Basically, the parable is, hey, it's a new day. I'm like a bridegroom. There's no day for a prayer meeting.

There's no day for a 30-day fast. Are you kidding me? The Son of Man is here. This ought to be festive. I mean, imagine showing up at a wedding, taking a bulletin from the guy in the back.

Thank you for coming. I'm deeply disturbed to have arrived, but I'll find my way in quietly. What? They'd kick you out. That's what Jesus is saying. I'm not going to put a new, I'm not going to take something new.

[33 : 21] My guys are new guys, and attach them to something old. You're not going to take a new wine and throw it in some old skin. I'm here to change things.

Now, the day will come when I'm not around and they'll have reason to mourn and life will be filled with things that make you want to pray and you're struggling and you'll fast, but not now.

Now, not now. save your fasts. It's a day of great feast, and it's a feast because the bridegroom has come.

The only tricky verse there is 39, isn't it? The word and isn't really quite appropriate in my opinion, but it almost is if the word, you know, it's not, if you look at the textual manuscripts, I almost want to begin 39, no one after drinking old wine desires new for he says the old is good.

That's a line that seems to cut against what he's already said. Wait a minute, I thought the new was good and I thought the new wine was good, but now it looks like the old is good.

[34 : 36] No, I don't think that's the case. I don't think Jesus is pitting himself against himself here. I think his use of the analogy is done at 38. I'm new.

My guys are new. I'm doing a new thing. And then I think almost he looks over at the Pharisees and goes, well, of course the old guys, they're going to stay with the old thing because they always think the old thing's better.

In other words, it's not an explication of the analogy, it's an indictment on the old world. two scenes, two homes, and then he moves to two separate Sabbath days.

The third scene in the grain fields on the Sabbath, the disciples beginning to pull grain off the stem and finding a little nourishment along the way.

Again, here they are, these recalcitrant Pharisees. What you're doing is not lawful on the Sabbath. Why are you doing this?

[35 : 54] Now you need to have some understanding of the Sabbath. It goes back through, I want to almost say through an event before the law. the event was the giving of manna in Israel's wilderness experience where God indicated that you were not to go out on the seventh day to find the manna.

You were to collect twice as much on the sixth day because the seventh day is a day of rest all the way back to creation. So there's a principle of rest on the seventh day. So you don't work on the seventh day.

And then when the law comes in Exodus 20, you're supposed to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. In fact, you can actually find text in the Old Testament where it says, don't even go out of your house. In other words, don't go to work.

Don't make it completely different than all the other days. And so the Pharisees, of course, had gotten all the way to the point where they applied this stuff with incredible rigor, where for them, the eating and the pulling of grain in a field on the Sabbath was the equivalent of the harvesting and the making and the baking of bread for a day that was supposed to be done all the day before.

Hey, you guys should have taken care of their stuff yesterday. I'm guessing the Pharisees probably had little pouches with the food that they had gathered the day before. They questioned his authority to forgive sins.

[37 : 18] They questioned his association with sinners. And now they question his activities on the Sabbath day. To which Jesus has very little time.

And so should we. He basically says your external observance as a means of justifying yourself before God is so wrongheaded.

I mean, when will you guys start thinking about your heart rather than what this guy has in his hand? I mean, don't you remember David?

I mean, if the anointed one was given bread by a himalek that was actually reserved for the presence of God, why can't I, the anointed one, the son of man, actually live in a way where my men are provided for even on the Sabbath?

I'm Lord of the Sabbath. I mean, he's dismissive at this point. Rightly so, because the Pharisees at the end of the day were more concerned with an external observance of law keeping than they were with the heart of an individual trying to follow after Christ.

[38 : 29] Well, that was a tough service for those guys. Probably a difficult sermon to hear. But it closes on another Sabbath. And notice, while the first three scenes, they are questioning him.

On the last scene, he doesn't give them any time to make any more questions. He's done with these guys. He's bringing change. In fact, he's the one now answering, asking the questions. There's a man who's come into church with a hand that's withered, the reasons for which we do not know, from birth or through some accident, at work or otherwise. And Jesus' heart goes out to this man.

He sits down and Jesus looks around and he's now going to ask the questions. I've got something to ask you.

You've been following me around for a couple weeks now. I'm asking you a question. Do-gooders, to all the do-gooders out there, can I do good on today or not? Is it okay to do good on the Sabbath?

[39 : 30] To which they're silent. And I love this. He doesn't say to them, withered man, withered hand man, your sins are forgiven.

No, what's he say? Stretch out your hand. No word here at all on the vertical relationship between the man and God.

Just a straightforward, raw exposure to my heart wants to make you well. that's Jesus.

Fully committed to the physical well-being of all because he is here to change the status quo in a world that has run amok in every which way.

And there it is. He pins the do-gooders into the corner. Over a question of doing good. And look at their response.

[40 : 35] It says they were filled with fury. Literally, it's like the word for your mind with a prefix like a not-mind.

They were filled with, well, these guys were out of their mind. Or put differently, they were senseless. And you know what? They were senseless.

Mindless. imagine being upset when somebody's physical well-being was made right. How twisted, how perverted, how wrong.

They got to figure out what to do with them. Why? Why? Why? He's here to change the status quo. And what was the status quo? Well, their week by week rhythm and routine had to go.

[41 : 46] Implication? A declaration of the forgiveness of sins has come. A commitment to the well-being of the whole person has arrived.

Attendance with the tax collectors and sinners is now here. The old is gone. The new has come. He's not here for the righteous, but for the sinners.

And on his day, he's at work. He's at work. providing for his own and bringing restoration to those who don't have it.

I don't know about you, but when I read these, I almost feel like no matter what door you come into, you come in the front door with Jesus, you come in the back door, you come in the side door, you come in on one end of the evangelical spectrum or the other, the deal is this.

change is required for Jesus has come. Our heavenly father, as we look at this, we have seen that you are bigger than all our categories and that we all need to humbly find our way to you.

[43 : 10] And I pray, Lord, that for us as a congregation, we would hold both ends, that we would love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and our neighbor as ourself.

For you are mighty to save and secure even in our midst. In Christ's name, Amen.