

Small Group Questions | March 10, 2019

Anyone leading the group this week may find additional Small Group Leader Resources at <http://www.wcchapel.org/resources-for-small-group-leaders/>

The Great Explorers — Jesus at a Table with Sinners

Focus Passage: Luke 5:27–39

Context: Luke 5:1–39; Matt 9:9–17

Other Passages Referenced: Acts 1:8; Luke 10:33; John 11:66;

Sermon Recap: Lent is a season of less in a culture of more. Jesus does not obsess over adding more to the docket of his ministry; rather he aligns every aspect of his life with God's mission for his life. Jesus' feasting at a table with Matthew Levi, other tax collectors, and 'sinners' shows his 'table manners;' he is both available and approachable for questions and questionable people. This Lenten season, let's focus on aligning ourselves with Jesus and his ways—alignment before addition. Rather than rushing to add more possessions, activities, or ministries, let's be available and approachable to questions and questionable people.

Small Group Questions and Leader Resources

Introductory Comments to Group Leaders:

Our passage this week, Luke 5:27–39, focuses on two “controversy stories.” First Jesus calls Levi/Matthew, a tax collector and then has table fellowship with Levi and a number of his fellow outcasts. Then Jesus' disciples are questioned by the Pharisees for eating and drinking instead of fasting like the disciples of John the Baptist and other segments of Judaism. These two controversy stories are wedged between two other controversies in a series—Jesus' claim to be able to forgive sins (Luke 5:17–26) and Jesus' claim to be Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).

When you discuss question 3 about not calling “the righteous” to repentance, in case group members don't arrive at “no one is righteous so Jesus must be referring to the self-righteous,” you may want to lead them through the verses found in the “what we hope members glean” section. Also, I have posted a 1½ page article by Tim Keller entitled, “All of Life is Repentance.” Any group member who has a log-in on the groups page of the church website can find the article by clicking on “Resources.” Designated group leaders can also see it on the website groups page or the Groups tool for leaders under the “Resources” tab. This short article has been revolutionary for me personally in my understanding and desire to repent. You may find it worth taking a whole group meeting to discuss together.

Sunday's sermon emphasized Jesus' “table manners” of being available and approachable for questionable or marginalized outcasts. The more we understand the gospel, the more we realize that we are those questionable people with questions we cannot answer on our own. In your group discussion of availability and approachability, try to balance between being available to spend time with questionable people and also making sure we're available to spend time with Jesus ... Making sure we are approachable for questions from others as well as willing to approach Jesus and his church with our unanswered questions.

In Luke 5:33–39, Jesus' answer to the question about why his disciples do not fast according to the religious practices of the Pharisees and others, Jesus illustrates how the gospel of the Kingdom of God does not fit into the Pharisees' understanding of the law and religious system. Jesus uses the word “new” seven times in four verses in contrasting the “new” of His Kingdom with the old the Pharisees were trying to preserve.

Background Helps

Levi – In the parallel passage of Matthew 9:9, the tax collector was named Matthew, and the name Matthew appears in all four lists of the twelve disciples. “Although Mark and Luke did not equate Levi with Matthew, Matthew clearly did. Since first-century Jews often had two names (usually one in Hebrew or Aramaic and the other in Greek or Latin), there is no reason why this tax collector could not have been called Levi Matthew.”¹

Pharisees – The term “Pharisee” means “separated one.” Perhaps it means that they separated themselves from the masses or that they separated themselves to the study and interpretation of the law. During the years of exile in Babylonia, where the Jews did not have their designated temple at which to offer sacrifices, the Pharisees were instrumental in transforming Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to a religion of the law. Pharisees accepted all the OT as authoritative and saw themselves as the preservers of God’s word and traditions by adding their interpretation/commentary as ‘the oral law’. They often opposed Jesus because He challenged their interpretations of the oral law.²

Tax Collectors (sometimes called Publicans) – Jesus mentions tax collectors in the same category with harlots in Matt 21:32. Tax collectors usually charged more than the taxes they were required to send to Rome and held back the excess as profit for themselves. Although most tax collectors were Romans, Jewish tax collectors were doubly despised, being viewed as disloyal Israelites aiding and abetting the foreign occupying power as well as extortionists of their own people.

The Significance of Eating and Drinking with Others – “This shared activity implied acceptance of such people as one’s ‘brothers and sisters’ (cf. Acts 11:3 and the explanation in 11:4–18, esp. 11:18; cf. also Gal 2:12–13). To ‘break bread’ with someone had important consequences. Even as contact with lepers (Luke 5:12–16) brought ritual uncleanness, so in the minds of the Pharisees contact with tax collectors and sinners brought moral (as well as ritual) uncleanness.”³

Hook: *Pick a Question to Help Ignite Conversation*

What kinds of manners were expected at your childhood dinner table?

Do you have a policy about phones at the table?

Look—Observing and Interpreting:

READ Luke 5:27–39

1. What does the “after this” in verse 27 refer to? (Scan Luke 5:17–26).
2. In 5:28–29, how did Levi/Matthew respond to Jesus’ call to follow Him?
3. What do you think Jesus meant when He said He did not come to call the righteous but to call sinners to repentance?

Illustrations:

Illustrations and quotes can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org

Took: *Applying the message to our lives.*

¹ Ibid.

² Charles W. Draper with Harrop Clayton, “[Jewish Parties in the New Testament](#),” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 917.

³ Stein, 182.

1. How do your “table manners” align with Jesus’? —seeking alignment with God’s mission before adding on other activities ... being available ... being approachable for questions ... being approachable for questionable people? The sermon asked, “Who is not at your table?”
2. The Pharisees had a hard time fitting Jesus into their religious system. Do you have questions about how Jesus fits into your preconceived beliefs? ... About how the New Testament fits with the Old Testament? ... In terms of following Jesus in a changing culture? If so, write down your top two. Who can you think of who might be able to help you answer those questions? Will you set up a time with them to ask and seek a response for your questions?
3. Many of us were taught to believe in Jesus from early childhood, often having a fuzzy understanding of what it means to repent. I encourage *you to* read the article, “All of Life is Repentance,” that can be found on the wcchapel.org site. Click on the “Find a Group” button on the home page. After you log-in on that groups page, click on your small group and then click on the “Resources” tab. You should find the article there.
4. How would you like the group to pray for you specifically as you aim to align yourself more with God’s priorities in light of the above questions?

Prayer: Please spend time praying for one another.

What we hope members glean from the passage.

1. Jesus healed a paralyzed man whose friends brought him to Jesus, but before healing him Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” The Pharisees asked a natural question from a human perspective, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21) It would have been blasphemy if Jesus were not God. With this context in mind, we see that the Pharisees were already having issues with Jesus.
2. Levi “left everything,” got up and followed Jesus. He also hosted a great feast at his home and invited lots of others including a large group of tax collectors. He not only followed Jesus but Levi/ Matthew introduced his circle of friends to Jesus.
3. In light of the biblical teaching that there is none righteous (Rom 3:10–23) and that the call to repentance is universal (Luke 3:3; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30), “righteous” here should be understood as *those who falsely think themselves righteous*. Later in Luke 16:15 he described them as “ones who justify [themselves] in the eyes of men” and in 18:9 as “confident of their own righteousness and look[ing] down on everyone else,” i.e., as falsely assuming that they were righteous⁴

⁴ Ibid.