

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture this evening is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the fifth chapter beginning at the twenty-seventh verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." ²⁸ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. ²⁹ Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. ³⁰ And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ Jesus answered and said to 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."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Using a completely non-scientific study as my proof, it was found that nearly 60% of people would agree with the statement "I am a good person." Of course they all had their own understanding of what a 'good' person is and many of them even admitted that they were being completely subjective and biased in their answer.

In another completely non-scientific survey done by myself, it was found that no Pharisee in John's gospel the eighth chapter thought that they were a bad person. In fact,

those Pharisees were, basically, calling Jesus a liar because they did not want to hear His word and only wanted to hear their own opinions.

During the exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus, it was brought up that Jesus spoke about His Father, who is also our Father, God... but the Pharisees made sure to point out who their father was, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free.’?” Yes, they were arguing with Jesus about the rights of a Father and also about sin... and these Pharisees were convinced that they were not sinful, at least not like other people were. They knew this because they were the children of Abraham and thus they were ‘good people.’

You see, even in Jesus’ day there were people who felt that they were ‘good people.’ And this is brought out very

brilliantly in our text this evening. While Jesus was at Levi’s, Matthew’s, house eating a meal the Pharisees couldn’t pass up an opportunity to show how ‘good’ they were.

Yet, it is during this meal that Jesus makes sure to point out that He did not come to call or reach out to the righteous people; no, Jesus came to call and reach out to sinners. Yes, Jesus Christ was born in order to call ***sinners to repentance.***

Looking back at the Pharisees from John’s gospel, one must understand that they truly thought they were ‘better’ than others and that, therefore, they were ‘good’ people. They followed the laws with strict adherence, they tithed, they went to Temple, they were the zealous people... the ones who really knew their stuff when it came to God.

However, when we look back to the Old Testament we see Abraham, but I don’t

remember him being like the Pharisees. In fact one time when Abraham noticed God coming down the road, he immediately ran out to meet Him, bowed down before Him, and pleaded with Him to come into his house.

The Pharisees, Abraham's descendants, saw Jesus, hated Him, constantly sought reasons and ways to kill Him, arrested Him, beat Him, mocked Him, jailed Him, and partook as far as they were able in His crucifixion. The Pharisees did not recognize God from a distance, they did not bow down and worship Him and they did not want Him to be with them. If they are Abraham's descendants, something must have gotten crossed in understanding.

And we too, have often gotten our understandings crossed when we consider that we are God's children. God has claimed each and every one of us in His baptism,

through His word, and through His holy supper... and we do not act like it.

God is holy and perfect, we are not. God is loving and forgiving, we are not. God is caring, kind, and compassionate, we are not. God is everything... we very often amount to nothing.

And though this is our lot, I do wonder how many of us at the beginning of the sermon thought, "Well, I'm not that bad." And our sinful nature pushed this notion on us more and more. Instead of seeing our sinfulness and our 'badness,' we see ourselves as good... especially compared to those other people.

I know I'm good, because I come to church on Wednesday night. I know I'm good, because I read my Bible and devotions every day. I know I'm good because I have memorized 57 hymns. I know I'm good...

because there is always someone worse to compare myself to. And this is the trap that the Pharisees fell into also.

On this night of the feast at Levi's, the Pharisees fell into this trap once again. The Pharisees noted those who were coming to the meal and they approached Jesus' disciples and asked, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Why are you associating with "those" people? Why are you letting them get close to you? Why would you want them at your dinner?

And Jesus tells us why... it is because Jesus did not come into this world to call the righteous people. Jesus did not come into this world to call those people who are righteous in their own eyes. Jesus did not come into this world to call people who can save themselves.

No, Jesus came into this world to call sinners. Jesus came into this world to let His voice resound to all those who have sinned and who cannot save themselves. Jesus came into this world to make sure that though they are despised by society and at times the 'religious elite,' Jesus came to call the sinners... the downtrodden, the marginal, the ones who no one else cares about and loves.

Jesus came into this world to live a perfect life for every sinner. Jesus came into this world to suffer and die an innocent death for each and every sinner. Jesus came into this world to rise three days later for sinners. Jesus came into this world so that sinners, so that you and me, could have salvation from all of our sins and we could know that heaven is waiting for us.

And it is now through faith that we know that we are not righteous in and of ourselves. Through faith, we know that we have sinned

and we will continue to sin. Through faith we know that of ourselves we amount to ‘not good people.’ Yet, it is also through faith that we know that our Savior came into this world to live and die for us. Through faith we know that we now have forgiveness of our sins. Through faith we know heaven is ours. Yes, this is what we know and what we have come to long for.

We must also admit that sin will be with us every day this side of heaven. We know that it will be a hard journey to get to our final day... but with Jesus Christ on our side we know that we have already won the battle.

And thanks be to God that Jesus did not come into this world to call and save the righteous... because then He would have come for no reason; rather, we can be glad and rejoice that Jesus came to save and call sinners to repentance. He came so that we might acknowledge our sinfulness, realize

that of ourselves we can do nothing, but once we know Jesus Christ and His salvation... well now we know that heaven is waiting.

Dear friends in Christ, as Jesus sat at that meal I can only imagine how He felt knowing the thoughts and attitudes of the Pharisees... and yet He still used this as a teaching moment for them and all of His hearers. Jesus wanted all to know that He did not come to save those who are righteous in their own eyes, He did not come to save the personally-‘good’ people; no, Jesus came to call sinners to repentance and to salvation.

Thanks be to God that He chose me to be a partaker of His salvation. Thanks be to God that I now know that I am not a perfect child of God. And thanks be to God that Jesus did not come to call righteous people, because I would never get to heaven; but that He came to call sinners, like me, to repentance.

Thanks be to God. Amen.