

8. The differences Jesus makes

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All of us want to be better in everything we do. I want to be a better follower of Jesus Christ, a better husband, a better dad and a better pastor than before. I am sure that you all can come up with your own list of "I-want-to-be-better".

Among our lists, there is something we can do and make the difference with our own capabilities. But there also are many things we can not do at all, because they are a way over our heads. Those things can only be done by the power of God.

If you are born-again Christians, you would remember how you were before Christ saved your eternal life. You may had some gradual changes as well as some abrupt and rapid changes that Christ made in your life. They were the changes for better and they were done not by your or my power, but by Jesus our God alone.

Dr. Luke describes in this chapter our Lord's meetings with four group of individuals and the changes they experienced because they trusted Him and He met them where they were.

A. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE HEARTS OF THE FISHERMEN

Luke 5:1-11 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

This event is not the same one as it is described in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20. In those accounts, Peter and Andrew were busy fishing, but in this account they had fished all night and caught nothing and were washing their nets. Jesus had enlisted Peter, Andrew, James and John earlier, but then they went back to their trade. Now He would call them to a life of full-time discipleship.

Jesus used Peter's ship as a platform from which to address the huge crowd on the shore. At the same time, Peter became a "captive audience" as he sat in the ship listening to the Word of God. Good ol' late Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, "Every pulpit is a fishing boat, a place to give out the Word of God and attempt to catch fish."

We sometimes feel like those discouraged fishermen when our ingenuity proves fruitless and our best efforts come up empty. But it's in those times of weakness that God often surprises us with the bright rays of His power.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In my opinion, Peter still had a twisted cynical attitude and wanted to show Jesus who is better in fishing. After all, Jesus was a carpenter by trade, and what do carpenters know about fishing? It was a well-known fact that, in the Sea of Galilee, you caught fish at night in the shallow water, not in the daytime in the deep water. What Jesus asked Peter to do was contrary to all of his training and experience.

I am sure that you've noticed in your own life, too, that God doesn't go by our own logic, calculation and timetable which drives us crazy all the time. What He asks us to do often is opposite of what we want to do. That is when our faith in Him comes in and obey His instruction.

Once Peter saw the catch of the century, he suddenly realized that he stood in the presence of deity. As Peter was recognized Jesus for who He is the Messiah, he also saw himself for who he was – a sinful man.

Whenever we have a vision of who Jesus really is, it will always give us a realistic perspective of who we really are, as well. We fail to see the truth about ourselves until we see ourselves in His light. Seeing ourselves in His light always brings convictions.

Jesus wasn't giving these rough, seasoned fishermen a lesson in fishing. His objective was to change their lives.

Jesus chose uneducated men, but He taught them for over three years. You don't need fancy degrees and education to start out in ministry, but you must enroll yourself in the Seminary of the Word of God where the Holy Spirit is the Dean.

Jesus made the difference in the heart of the fishermen who became disciples.

B. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE HEARTS OF THE LEPER

Luke 5:12-16 And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." 13 Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. 14 And He charged him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded." 15 However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. 16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

One form of leprosy, a.k.a Hansen's disease, attacks the nerves so that the victim cannot feel pain. Infection easily sets in, and this leads to degeneration of the tissues. The limb becomes deformed and eventually falls off. It was literally a dead man walking.

Leprosy also is compared with the nature of sin spiritually. In the beginning, a little pet sin seems nothing to be concerned about and can be controlled at our will. As

leprosy attacks the nerve systems and destroys it, our sins attack our conscience and it becomes dull and unresponsive to our sins. Pretty soon, we become the people who are alive physically, yet spiritually contaminated and corrupted.

For this leper's case, he had no doubt at all about the ability of Jesus to heal. His only question was if Jesus was willing to heal. In a desperation, he did the unthinkable – he drew near to Jesus without any expectation, without any bargaining, just hoping that Jesus would have compassion on him.

In response to the leper's cry, Jesus did the unimaginable. He touched the leper. Someone could accuse Him that He broke the law of Moses by touching the leper. No, He didn't break the law, because the moment He touched the leper, he became whole and no more leprosy was found in him.

How long had it been since he had felt the tender touch of another human being? How long since he had belonged and been welcome among others? How do we treat other brothers and sisters who come to us in desperation with their deepest cries and needs? Do we shove them off with a quick pre-formatted prayer as a lip service? Do we ignore them because they are not worthy of our time and effort since they are not in the so-called same class as we are?

If we do that, we ought to be shamed of ourselves. While we were still sinners, Jesus reached down to the wretched people like us and touched us to make us whole. Shouldn't we do the same? I hope and pray that none of us think that we are some special class people because we have more wealth and education than others. We are all sinners forgiven by the grace of God.

While the former leper was still enjoying the ecstasy of the healing power of God, Jesus told him unbelievable – "Don't tell anyone." But the cleansed leper became an enthusiastic witness for the Lord. Jesus commands us to tell everybody, and we keep quiet. So from now on, don't say anything about the salvation through Jesus Christ to anyone at all.

Jesus made the difference in the heart and body of the leper who became a believer.

C. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE HEARTS OF THE PARALYTIC

Luke 5:17-26 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. 19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. 20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what

he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. 26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"

The scribes and Pharisees picked a good time to attend one of our Lord's meetings, because God's power was present in a special way and Jesus would heal a man with paralysis. But Jesus would do more than healing the man. He would also forgive his sins and teach the crowd a lesson in forgiveness.

When the Pharisees said, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" they were correct. Nobody can, not a pope, not a priest, not your daddy, not your homie, but only God. Jesus declared that He had the authority to forgive as God. There are many cult groups like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses that deny the deity of Jesus Christ and argue that Jesus had never claimed that He was a God. Here He did it plain and simple. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what Jesus said and meant.

Our Lord's miracles not only demonstrated His deity and His compassion for needy people, but they also revealed important spiritual lessons about salvation. They were "object lessons" to teach spiritually blind people what God could do for them if only they would believe in His Son.

Jesus made the difference in the heart and body of the paralytic and his friends who became believers.

D. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE HEARTS OF THE TAX MAN

Luke 5:27-39 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. 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?" 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." Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days." Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, "The old is better.""

Tax collectors were despised as traitors and extortioners. As a class they were excommunicated from the Jewish faith. Since the tax rates were not always clear, it was easy for a dishonest man to make extra money for himself.

When Jesus called Levi, He accomplished three things: He saved a lost soul. He added a new disciple to His group. He also created an opportunity to explain His ministry to Levi's friends and to the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus even gave Levi a new name 'Matthew' which means the gift of God.

To follow Jesus, he would be trading a business gold mine for an uncertain life on the road. But Jesus was offering him the bread of life, an eternal and honest treasure. Without hesitation, the scales in his heart tipped toward Jesus. He grabbed his coat, locked his office door, and never returned.

Jesus made the difference in the heart of the tax collector who became a disciple.

The scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus because they did not understand either His message or His ministry. Jesus simply did not fit into their traditional religious life. In order to help them understand, Jesus gave four illustrations of what He was doing in a rapid succession.

In v31-32, Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees didn't even realize that they were spiritually blinded and appeared to be righteous on the outside but were corrupt within.

In v33-35, Jesus talked about having joy in the Lord as He used the parable of the friends of the bridegroom. Jesus came to give us life abundantly, not bummers and bummers.

Some legalistic Christians think that it is not right to have fun in the Lord. They even think that it is a blasphemy to have musical instruments like guitars and drums in the church. Obviously they didn't read the Book of Psalm. They even look miserable without smile. I think they drink a half gallon of concentrated lemon juice every half hour to have those special faces. As I have said before, God has a great sense of humor – He made you and me.

In v36-39, Jesus' point is clear. You can't fit His new life into the old forms. This explains why Jesus did not begin a reform movement within Judaism. He has a brand new way that is so free without any man-made tradition.

E. CHALLENGES

- 1) What kind of differences does Jesus make in your heart?
- 2) When Jesus tries to make changes in your heart, do you resist against Him or do you open your heart to embrace His new and better way?
- 3) What would you do if the Lord tells you to do a totally unthinkable, unimaginable and unbelievable thing against every fiber in your heart? Would you obey Him?