

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom
(Studies in the Gospel of Luke)

When Status Quo Has Got to Go

(Luke 5:27-6:11)

Study #1

Introduction: Change resistant...

If following Jesus means anything, it means embracing change.

Jesus says, **[Matthew 5:48] "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!"** For some of us, that will involve change.

He calls us to become the person who loves, serves, prays, and gives. And He frequently invites us to say "No!" to the *status quo*, to traditions, and to familiar ruts.

Change, though, can be tough. And those who have known success in doing things in familiar ways may have the toughest time embracing change.

Henry Ford is known for many things, most famously for mass producing his Model T a century ago, which put the Ford Motor Company at the top of the auto-making heap.

Ford loved his Model T so much that he couldn't imagine changing anything about it.

Well, once, William Knudson, a top executive at Ford, ordered the production of a "new and improved" Model T.

When Henry Ford returned from a trip to Europe, he saw the new design created by Knudsen.

A mechanic who was on the scene recorded Ford's reaction when he saw the red (it was not) version of his beloved Model T.

"Ford walked around that car three or four times. Finally, he got to the driver's side, got hold of the door, and he ripped the door right off! How the man did it, I don't know. Then, he did the same thing to the other door. He tore off the windshield. He jumped over the back seat and started pounding on the top. He ripped the top with the heel of his shoe. He wrecked that car."

At least in that instance, Henry Ford wasn't a fan of change.¹ Change had stepped on his *status quo* toes, and he didn't like it.

This morning, we see Jesus confront the *status quo* of the first century Jewish leaders. He stepped on some very sensitive toes.

They didn't like the changes Jesus was introducing to the life of faith any more than Henry Ford liked changes to his favorite car.

Today, Jesus calls each of us to be willing to let go of our comfortable *status quo* and follow Him into fresh, new obedience.

Review...

Last Sunday, we watched as Jesus laid claim to be the Messiah, the One who would fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah 61.

He made that claim in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, but the claim didn't go over well at all.

His friends and family rejected Him, dragged Him out of the synagogue and to the edge of the cliff on which the city had been built.

¹ Ford's rage validates John Steinbeck's observation that "It is the nature of a man as he grows older to protest against change, particularly change for the better."

They were ready to throw Him off the cliff and kill Him, but He calmly passed through their midst and went on His way.

In the next scene from Luke's Gospel, He is in the synagogue of the fishing city of Capernaum, the town that became His ministry headquarters.

Jesus was teaching there on the Sabbath and His message amazed the people because He gave it with authority.² Then, with equal authority, Jesus cast a demon out of a man - right there in the synagogue. (4:31-37)³

Next, Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a high fever.⁴ As soon as He healed her, a crowd of very needy people descended on Jesus. He healed their diseases and cast out more demons. (4:38-41)

On another day, He was teaching crowds of people by the Sea of Galilee. To make it easier for people to hear Him, Jesus got into a fishing boat that belonged to Simon and taught from the boat.

After the teaching, He told Simon to head out into the deep water and let down his fishing nets. Now Simon hadn't caught a thing during the fishing of the previous night. He resisted Jesus' command, but then relented, **[5:5] "I will do as You say and let down the nets."**

As soon as he put out the nets, the fish raced into the nets. There were so many fish that they were able to fill Simon's boat and the boat of their partners, James and John, too.

Jesus told them all to forget about fish.

He promised, **[10] "from now on you'll be catching people."** They all dropped everything and started following Jesus. (5:1-11)

² We hear the same comment by people after Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:28-29)

³ This was the first miracle Luke records in his Gospel, a victory over a demon after He successfully resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness and right in line with Jesus' claim to be the Messiah who would set captives free.

⁴ Significantly, the first healing Luke mentions is of a woman. Throughout our study of Luke, we will see Luke give a lot of exposure to the Lord's love for women, Gentiles, children and all those with little political or social power.

The last two scenes before we turn to today's main passage show Jesus (1) cleansing a man who was suffering from leprosy (5:12-16) and then (2) first forgiving and then healing a lame man who had been dropped through a ripped-up roof by friends and lowered right in front of Jesus. (5:17-26)

It was right after this messed-up-roof miracle that Jesus began to really push the envelope.

He started stretching the categories of some of the religious leaders of His day with actions that they considered too edgy. Too much change.

A Change Too Far (5:27-29)

Jesus Calls Levi (Matthew) To Follow Him (5:27-28)

Getting to know Levi (v. 27a)

[27a] After that He went out, and looked at a tax collector named Levi, sitting in the tax office...

Capernaum was not a huge city. So, it isn't a stretch to suggest that Jesus and Levi might have known each other or at least known about each other.

Jesus was the well-respected, increasingly popular Jewish rabbi. Levi was the hated traitor who collected exorbitant taxes for the Romans from his fellow Jews.

Calling Levi (v. 27b)

Jesus did what no one would have imagined a Rabbi would do. ***[27b]...He (Jesus) said to him (Levi), "Follow Me."***

This was an invitation to Levi to do exactly what Peter and Andrew and James and John were doing: Be Jesus' disciple.

Luke doesn't tell us who was present when Jesus invited Levi to follow. But, if religious types had been there, they would have been appalled. What was Jesus thinking, inviting someone like Levi to be His disciple?

For one thing, first century Jewish rabbis didn't typically invite people to follow them. Would-be disciples asked to be allowed to follow this or that rabbi.

And the rabbi would accept into his group only the best, the cream of the crop, those with the most potential. Certainly not Levi.

Against all expectations, Rabbi Jesus invited Levi the tax-collector, Levi the outcast to be His disciple. Every bit as surprising as Jesus' call was Levi's response.

Levi's "Yes!" (v. 28)

[28] And he left everything behind, and got up began following Him."

The Bible gives no insight into the factors behind Levi's "Yes" to Jesus' invitation. We simply don't know what moved him to accept an invitation to follow Jesus.

Let's assume that Levi understood that following this rabbi would involve change, just as Jesus' invitation was a change from the typical Jewish model.

And if Jesus' pursuit of Levi as a disciple was an offense to the Pharisees and scribes, we can only imagine that the event Luke records next sent them into orbit.

Jesus Clarifies His Mission (5:29-32)

Party time! (v. 29)

[29] And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them.

At this dinner party were Levi and his friends AND Jesus and His other disciples.

No doubt, Levi meant for this party to be a way to introduce his old friends to his new Friend / friends. Picture the scene...

Was the drinking excessive? How did female attenders interact with Jesus? How did He interact with them? Were crude jokes told?

We're naïve if we can't see that this would not have been an altogether wholesome setting. And the wisdom of the day would have said that Jesus, a holy man, should never have gone to Levi's party.

But Levi's brief exposure to Jesus had somehow convinced him that if he invited Jesus, Jesus would say, "Yes!" - and He did.

Watch Jesus circulate at this party.

He is comfortable. He's telling stories and He's listening to their stories. This is holiness incarnate interacting with notorious sinners.

The first century thinking was that unclean sinners would defile a holy man. Not to worry.

Jesus wasn't at all corrupted by them. In fact, it's working the other way around. He's rubbing off on them. They're hungering for God because He is there.

Looked at from within, the party was wonderful. Levi and his old friends were loving it. But, for those on the outside looking in, it was an extreme scandal.

Jesus' presence at this party caused a lot of concern to the Pharisees and scribes who saw what was going on.

Complaint time (v. 30)

[30] The Pharisees and their scribes⁵ began grumbling to His disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?”

We notice that the Pharisees’ grumbles were directed at the disciples, not at Jesus - which seems mildly cowardly.

But even though they hadn’t grumbled at Jesus, Jesus answered their accusing question.

Explanation time (vv. 31-32)

[31] And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners.”

“I made this house call exactly because I am a Physician of souls. I am the Doctor sinners need.”

We can see from our two thousand years vantage point what might have been hard to see then. Namely, that the harsh, judgmental Pharisees were in greater danger of judgment than the tax-collectors, who were guilty of the more obvious sins.

To be focused on the sins of others and unaware of how sin works in our own hearts is much more dangerous than to be self-aware, reflective, and identifying as a sinner in need of grace.

In the narrative we’ve just seen, Jesus has established Himself as a Change Agent.

Levi and his friends need to change, and He’s going to lead them into change.

Plus, Jesus is changing the focus of God’s mission on earth from satisfaction with the *status quo* to disruption, from focusing on the

⁵ Did these Pharisees and scribes actually live in Capernaum, or were they already being dispatched from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus? It is conceivable that the Sanhedrin might have sent them to find out what Jesus was up to.

familiar to reaching outside the box, from focusing on the insider and the together person, to serving the outsider who knows she’s or he’s not at all got it all together.

It’s getting uncomfortable. But hats off to the Pharisees. They don’t back away from Jesus.

This time, they don’t ask the disciples their question. They directed their question to Jesus.⁶

Time To Toss Sacred Cows (vv. 33-39)

The Old Guard’s Problem with Jesus (v. 33)

They notice that Jesus and His disciples don’t behave the way other religious people do. Take fasting...

According to the Old Testament Law, there was only one day-long fast which the Jews were required to observe, and that was the fast of the Day of Atonement.⁷

But the Pharisees fasted way more often, usually fasting twice per week. And, while we don’t know how often they fasted, the disciples of John the Baptist also fasted.

By contrast (except for the required fast on the Day of Atonement), Jesus and His followers didn’t fast. Understandably, that confused the Pharisees and scribes.

[33] And they said to Him, “The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same; but Yours eat and drink.”

⁶ It seems clear to me that the “*they*” of verse 33 are the same ones who had just been questioning Jesus about hanging with Levi and his friends. “*They*” are the Pharisees and the scribes. One other time the disciples of John asked the question about fasting. (Matthew 9:14)

⁷ Through the years other fasts were added to the calendar. From the days of Queen Esther forward, it had become tradition that devout Jews fasted four times per year.

Listen to Jesus' gracious response to this honest question.

Jesus Takes On Their Question (vv. 34-39)

Why fast when Life and Joy is right HERE?! (vv. 34-35)

[34] And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the groom fast while the groom is with them, can you?"
[35] "But the days will come; and when the groom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days."⁸

In Scripture, there are numerous reasons why someone might fast. It might be that they are seeking to draw near to God or even to establish mastery over an appetite. Those are legit reasons to fast.

But today and in Jesus' day, lots of people fast because of great sorrow over loss or when repenting of sin.⁹

So, what if someone's sin is forgiven AND they are walking around in a state of joy AND God Incarnate is right by their side?

Why would that person fast? For that person, fasting makes as much sense as asking the wedding party to fast at the reception.

Notice that Jesus didn't rebuke the Pharisees for fasting. But He has drawn a distinction between His followers and all other religious groups.

"We are not the same, us and you. It makes a lot of sense for YOU to fast. If My disciples were in your shoes, they would fast, too. But they aren't. They have received the Good News. They are with Me. They have My LIFE. If you were in My disciple's shoes, you wouldn't fast either."

⁸ Jesus suggests that vastly different days are coming when the Groom will be taken away, when fasting will be the most natural thing in the world. This is the first hint Jesus gives in Luke's account of His death.

⁹ In the New Testament, fasting is sometimes due to mourning, but is also can be a worshipful part of a request for guidance or as a spiritual discipline.

See what Jesus did? He answered the Pharisees' question about fasting, turning it into an invitation to follow Him.

He continued with three short parables to make the same point.

Three parables drive home the point (vv. 36-39)

The parable of the old and new garment (v. 36)

[36] And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the patch from the new garment will not match the old."

To ruin a new garment by cutting a piece from it and sewing it onto an old, tattered garment, which the new patch wouldn't match anyway, would be double folly. Nobody would do that.

So, what's the point of patches and old and new garments? Why does Jesus mention them when He is speaking with Pharisees about His disciples' practices vs. theirs? Think about it...

And while you're thinking about it, listen to this.

The parable of the old and new wineskins (vv. 37-38)

[37] "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. [38] But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

This parable affirms the folly of putting wine that is not fully fermented into old skin containers that have already been stretched.¹⁰

Fermenting wine will swell and burst the old skins, with the loss of the new wine and the old wineskins.

¹⁰ Skin bottles were made from a single goatskin, from which the flesh and bones are drawn without ripping up the skin. The neck of the animal became the neck of the bottle.

This second parable is just like the first one about patches and old and new cloth except that in the first parable the new garment is ruined but the old garment is just made less attractive.

In this second parable, both the new wine and the old wineskins are destroyed.

Again, what is the point of Jesus telling this parable to the Pharisees now? While you are thinking about that, listen to Jesus' final, short parable comment.

The parable of the old and new wine (v. 39)

[39] "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

Here, Jesus doesn't say that anything is lost. He doesn't even say that either the old or the new are better. He just says that if you have grown accustomed to the old, you will have a taste for it and you won't want the new.

Those of you who have been to the same restaurant with me more than once know that I'm not an experimental diner. If I find something on a menu that I like, I stick with it, over and over again.

Jesus gets me.

So, His comment about people who like the old stuff is Him saying to the Pharisees, "I understand. I get it."

It's a gracious way of letting them know that He gets why they aren't drawn to seeing things His way, might not embrace His teaching, might not want to follow Him. They were just fine with Moses.

But the old garment, the old wineskins, and the old wine all represent the old way to approach life and God. The new garment, the new wineskins and the new wine represent Jesus' new, improved way to live before God.

So, in each of these images there is an implicit invitation to the Pharisees to be done with the old: "You guys really don't know what you're missing. Try My new way. Follow Me into LIFE."

And we're not finished. We have two more scenes to see. They are both included here to illustrate, again, the beauty of change and Jesus' departure from the *status quo*.

Back To Basics (6:1-11)

Jesus and His Disciples Harvest / "Work" on the Sabbath (vv. 1-5)

[6:1] Now it happened that Jesus was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath, and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them.

They were enjoying this natural granola on a Sabbath day and some Pharisees who were watching them called them out.

[2] But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Yes, the Old Testament did say that it was not lawful to work - to do things like threshing, winnowing, and food prep - on the Sabbath.

But what the disciples were doing was not forbidden.

The Law explicitly allowed the plucking of the heads of grain out of a field and did not call it *work*. (See Deuteronomy 23:25)

So, Jesus took the opportunity to remind the Pharisees of a story from the Old Testament.

[3] And Jesus, answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, [4] how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?"¹¹

¹¹ From 1 Samuel 21 - David was running away from King Saul and had escaped to a place called Nob. He explained to the priest, Ahimelech, that he had followers

Jesus' point in mentioning this story to the Pharisees was to show that human need overrode the technical requirement of the Law.

And, as He closed out His argument, He further claimed to have the prerogative to do the same, with this: **[5] And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."**

Jesus was not admitting that He had violated God's Sabbath law by allowing His disciples to eat grain from the field.

He was saying that He would joyfully cut through any red tape that had been built around God's good command so that the Sabbath could be enjoyed to the full.

Then, on another Sabbath, Jesus violated another one of the Pharisees' nit-picky rules.

Jesus Doctors / "Works" on the Sabbath (6:6-11)

[6:6] On another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and taught; and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

[7] Now the scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely,¹² to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse Him.

This man had some sort of long-standing muscular atrophy or paralysis.

And the Pharisees were clear on the matter of medicine. Only in case of mortal illness was medical help permitted on the Sabbath. Anything other than emergency healing on a Sabbath would be work.

This man had been in bad shape for a long time. One more day wouldn't change anything.

with him who were famished. When he asked for bread, the priest gave him the loaves which were used in worship and were eaten only by the priests.

¹² **"Watching closely"** - The Greek word signifies to watch with sinister intent.

[8a] But He knew what they were thinking... Jesus knew their thoughts and He is going to invite them to think new thoughts.

Jesus called the man with the withered hand to join Him up front. The man came forward and Jesus asked the crowd a question.

[9] And Jesus said to them, "I ask you whether it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm, to save a life or to destroy it?"

According to Jesus the options were not between doing **good** or doing **nothing**, but between doing **good** and doing **evil**, because to fail to do good when good can be done is to do harm.¹³

And with that, Jesus acted.

[10] And after looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored. [11] But they themselves were filled with senseless rage, and began discussing together what they might do to Jesus.¹⁴

Jesus has again confounded the system of the Pharisees. He broke their picky add-on law to obey the LAW of God.

He has progressed in obedience to God by reverting back to basics again. He did what only He could do for a man in need. He loved.

A commitment to enjoy the full freedom God intended in this Sabbath incident in the grainfield invited the contempt and abiding opposition of the Pharisees.

Conclusion:

¹³ Is Proverbs 3:27 in the Lord's mind in this scene? **"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it."**

¹⁴ In stating that they discussed together what they might do to Jesus, Luke doesn't mean that they were undecided about killing Jesus, but only as to the best way of doing it. Two years before the end we see their determination to destroy Jesus.

Jesus invites us to lives marked by change, to be willing to let go of the *status quo*, to discover that sacred cows make the best burgers.¹⁵

In what we have seen today, we learn that following Him into His “NEW” involves two distinctives.

ONE, following Jesus involves lavishing value on all people, especially the least, the last, and the lost.

Jesus called a man (Levi) nobody thought was a good fit for any rabbi’s team *and* He did good to a man in need because He could.

Jesus will reliably put before you opportunities to love the one person you don’t “get”, the person who doesn’t fit in to your tribe, the one person who seems to have so little potential.

So, after you embrace the fact that lots of people don’t “get” you, that you don’t fit in to lots of other tribes, and that you are in some person’s list of “least likely to succeed,” approach that person.

God can use her. God wants him to follow Jesus. God’s power can be unleashed in that person - just as it has been unleashed in you.

Serve the person you wouldn’t normally serve, pray for the one you are tempted to pray against, love the one who doesn’t love you.

TWO, following Jesus involves saying “YES!” to God’s invitation to the beautiful adventure of freedom.

So much of our new life in Jesus is about freedom. Freedom from sin’s power and penalty. Freedom to love and to serve.

Jesus went an “iffy” party because it offered redemptive opportunities, *and* He allowed His disciples to pick heads of grain on the Sabbath because it wasn’t prohibited.

Jesus gives us freedom to push the envelope.

You are free to go where there is messiness if going there gives you an open door to share Jesus’ love.

You can break what is only tradition and tell the one you wouldn’t normally tell.

Far from restricting us, following Jesus expands horizons, unlocks doors, opens our eyes to new possibilities.

¹⁵ What we have here is a sandwich with Jesus’ explanation of the beauty of His new way (Luke 5:34-39) placed between His choice of Levi and partying with sinners on the one hand (5:27-28) and His violation of the Pharisees’ extra-biblical Sabbath-keeping traditions on the other (6:1-11).