

The Great Invitation

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, and welcome to The Table Church. My name is Anthony Parrott. I get to serve as the lead pastor here. I'm so glad that you are joining us today. If you're new to The Table Church, welcome. Thanks for giving us a shot online.

The Table Church is a church that's dedicated to joining God in his work of renewing all things, that we want to become authentic and thoughtful followers of Jesus. And we do that in lots of ways, one of which is by opening up God's Word and studying it together.

So if you have a Bible, I invite you to go find it, pick it up, turn it on, and we're going to be in the book of Luke. We're actually starting a new series today where we're going to be studying the life of Jesus.

We're actually going to be studying the book of Luke from now until after Easter, and looking at Jesus' life, what he did and what he said, his way of life, his patterns of living, and taking a look at how we can join Jesus in his life.

And so for the next few weeks, we're going to be focusing specifically on the healing love of Jesus. Where Jesus went, he brought healing.

[1 : 1 2] Jesus brought his love into the world, which was the love of God, into the world and brought healing to it. So that's what we're going to be taking a look at. Let's open up by me asking you a question.

When's the last time you admitted that you were wrong or that you needed help? When's the last time you admitted that you were wrong or that you needed help? In our house, we have a rule that when we're wrong, we have to say the words out loud, you were right and I was wrong.

Anthony, who is the dishwasher, clean or dirty? Oh, it's clean. We don't have to deal with it. Open it up. It's dirty. Oh, sorry. You were right and I was wrong.

We even say this to our children. I think it's important for children to see their parents say when they're wrong. Or when was the last time you admitted that you needed help? I am infamous for not admitting when I need help.

I just had to take our Christmas lights off of the house the other day. And I have too short of a ladder and too tall of a roof and put myself in a very precarious position. And I can see Emily, my wife, through the window being like, do you need my help?

[2 : 2 2] And me like hanging onto the roof with one hand being like, no, no, I'm good. After a little bit more serious. But after my brother died in a car accident, I was not handling my grief particularly well.

And I was being incredibly angry at our kids and at my spouse and basically anybody who dared get in my path. And I had to sit down and admit to my wife that I was grieving.

I was sad. And that sadness was being covered up by anger and rage at the world and everybody in it. And it took me a few months after my brother's funeral for me to admit that and get counseling.

There's actually one study that showed that it takes 10 and a half years for therapy patients between when they recognize that they need help and when they actually admit it and look for that help.

We live, as someone has put it, we live in an epidemic of infallibility where it's incredibly difficult to admit that we're wrong or that we've made a mistake or that we need help or that we need some sort of guidance or wisdom other than ourselves in our lives.

[3 : 36] If we admit that we're wrong, if we admit that we made a mistake, if we admit that we need help, then that may tarnish our image or our brand or our platform or it may ruin our job prospects or we're afraid that we can't control what somebody else thinks about us.

Dear God, oh no. But without admitting when we're wrong and when we need help, we're threatened by the fact that we will be repeatedly making the same mistakes over and over again and repeatedly hurting ourselves and the people around us.

I feel like the coronavirus has shown our country that we are doomed to learn lessons the hardest way possible by just making the same bad mistakes and not admitting when we're wrong.

When we refuse to acknowledge our fallibility, the fact that we can make mistakes, that we're not perfect, that we do need help, and we refuse that to acknowledge that, we starve our ability for change and for growth.

So today's main idea as we turn to the scriptures is that Jesus, God in the flesh, Jesus does his best work with those who know they need his help.

[4 : 59] Jesus does his best work with those who know they need his help. So if you have a Bible, we're going to be in the book of Luke, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11, and I'll read this out loud and stop a couple times to point out a few things that I think are important, and then we'll go on from there.

Luke chapter 5, it says, So just think about this scene.

There is a crowd of people pressing in on Jesus. They want to hear what this prophet, this preacher, this rabbi, Jesus has to say. And meanwhile, there's some fishermen at the lake, at their boats, who aren't part of the crowd.

We don't know why they're not part of the crowd, but we can make some guesses, we can read between the lines, especially as we go further in the story. Perhaps they didn't feel that they were worthy to listen to this rabbi or this teacher. Perhaps they were just simply too busy to listen to this rabbi or this teacher.

Perhaps they felt that what this rabbi, this teacher, Jesus had to say was not for them. So Jesus got into one of the boats, and the one belonging to Simon asked Simon to put out a little wave from the shore.

[6 : 25] And he sat down, because if you're on a boat, it's best to sit, and taught the crowds from the boat. Now, let's remember a couple things about this story. Simon and Jesus are not strangers to each other.

We actually know from Luke chapter 4, the chapter before, that Jesus has gone to Capernaum before the hometown of Simon, his brother Andrew, has gone into Simon's house, and Simon has a wife, and his wife has a mom, and the mom is sick, and Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, Simon's mother-in-law, Simon's wife's mom.

He heals this woman, and then turns Simon's home into a base of operations, where a bunch of people hear about Jesus and begins to bring healing to all of these people, which is typically not how you'd want your home to be used, where a bunch of sick people come, and a bunch of people who, in the first century, were called demon-possessed.

In other words, people who would have been ostracized by anybody. Jesus goes into Simon's home, and all the ostracized, marginalized people come into the home, when Jesus begins to heal them. So Simon and Jesus have a little bit of a history.

A little bit good, you healed my wife's mother, thanks, and a little bit bad, you turned my home into a hospital. What's going on? So Jesus finds Simon, Simon, who's not part of the crowd listening to Jesus' teaching, Simon, who is too busy working on his nets, goes into Simon's boat, asks him to put out from shore, and decides to preach from there.

[7 : 56] And there's lots of interesting things about Capernaum. Capernaum, the people there, they loved Jesus so much that they actually insisted that Jesus stay. Now Jesus refuses their request.

Jesus, we see this all in Luke chapter 4, goes, leaves Capernaum and says, look, I've got to go preach and teach other places too. So the people of Capernaum try to cling on to Jesus and claim Jesus as their own.

Jesus has none of this. Again, there's going to be an interesting contrast there with what Simon Peter says. Anyway, Jesus, Simon, they know each other. Simon has some notion of Jesus' growing reputation.

And Simon, very hilariously, is not part of the crowd. He can't be bothered. We'll keep going. Verse 4. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets.

The nets that Simon just got done cleaning. Put down your nets. For a catch. And Simon answers, Master, we have worked all night long, but have caught nothing.

[9 : 00] There's a little tinge of annoyance in Simon's tone right here. Simon, his livelihood is fishing. He knows what he's doing. And if you're fishing on the Sea of Galilee, you know that you do your best fishing at night.

That's when the fish come to the water. They had specific nets for daytime fishing and nighttime fishing. The word used here is for the nighttime fishing kinds of nets. The nets that Simon just got done cleaning.

And Jesus says, Hey, the thing that you just tried to do all night and didn't do a good job of, now go and try to do it again, but at the wrong time of day with the wrong kind of net. Simon says, We tried that, but if you say so, I'll let down the nets.

So there's a little bit of receptiveness here from Simon. Verse 6, When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break, possibly because of the wrong kind of nets.

So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and they filled both boats so much that they began to sink. There's a different sermon here about provision and abundance and God's place in that.

[10 : 01] Different sermon, different day. But when Simon saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees. And he says, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

Which is a really funny line. Most gospels, when they were written, were meant to be performed in some way, either by a very talented reader or some form of drama.

They were meant to be verbalized. You're meant to use your imagination as you're listening to the story. So remember, Jesus and Simon are in a boat in the deep part of the lake.

And Simon says to Jesus, Go away from me. And you can just imagine this as like a play or a movie. You can imagine Jesus looking around surrounded by water being like, Where do you want me to go, dude?

Simon says, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken. And so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

[11 : 03] But Jesus said to Simon and to the crowd, these fishing partners, Do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching people. And when they brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Almighty God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer, we ask that you would illuminate your word for us today, that we would be not merely hearers of it, but doers, Lord.

Help us to have understanding of what you have to say to us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. The first thing I want you to take note of is that Jesus is the first mover.

Jesus moves first. There is a false gospel out there, and I'll preach against this false gospel all day long. A false gospel that says that God cannot stand to be around unholiness and unholy people.

That there is an infinite chasm between the divine and the human. And that because humans are sinful people, that God cannot bear to be in their presence, this is bull.

[12 : 10] It's bad. It's false gospel. It's bad teaching. It's unbiblical. It's not true of God whatsoever. God always, the divine power, the divine person, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, whatever you want to call the divine, they always move towards creation.

God always moves towards creation, pressing in even when it's broken, even when it's in a state of rebellion, even if the people are so-called sinners, and we'll talk about that word in a second, God doesn't remove God's self because of God's holiness.

Holiness does not demand removal. Holiness, the way God embodies it, demands pressing in even to those who feel like they aren't worthy or have been told they aren't worthy.

And so Jesus is the first mover in this story. Jesus, who's preaching to a crowd, the crowd is pressing in on him. Jesus' response isn't to embrace the crowd. Remember, the crowd in Capernaum tried the same thing.

Don't move, Jesus. Don't leave. We claim you. We want you here. Jesus leaves anyway. There's a crowd now pressing in on him as he's preaching by the sea, and he goes and finds the guy who's not even paying attention.

[13 : 22] Simon. Jesus is the first mover. Jesus is known for continually crossing boundaries, gender boundaries, and ethnic boundaries, and socioeconomic boundaries, and ableist boundaries, who's well and who's unwell.

Jesus is always crossing boundaries to get closer to the people who have been told they can't get close to God. Jesus, these are his words from the book of John, only does what he sees the Father doing.

Jesus only does what God does. That's who Jesus is. God is not so holy that he removes himself from people because they're too sinful. No, Jesus moves closer and that's who God is.

So that's point number one. Point number two, it's that Peter stays humble. Now, Peter gets two things right. One thing wrong. The first thing he gets right is that he doesn't have an overinflated opinion of himself.

He knows that Jesus is not in the boat with him because Peter is so great and holy and wonderful. Peter knows that he is a sinner. Now, sin, sinner, all these words have lots of baggage.

[14 : 35] These words have been used and abused by preachers like me to ostracize and marginalize people and to create systems and structures in our society which make sure that these sinful sinners of sin are separated away from everyone else.

There's some alliteration for you. And we don't have time to unpack all that baggage but I like how Joel Green, a commentator on the book of Luke, defines a sinner. He puts it like this.

It's someone who recognizes they're in need of divine redemption or someone who has been ostracized by others and are in the greatest need of gracious intervention.

To admit that I am a sinner is simply to admit that I need divine help. Can I admit when I'm wrong or when I need help?

To admit that I am a sinner is not a statement as to my worth or my value or who I am as a human being. I am a person created in the image of God.

[15 : 39] Scripture makes that clear. We can go back to a sermon I preached last year on the transfiguration and how Jesus being transfigured does not reveal Jesus' divinity but rather it reveals God's intention for humanity.

I am a divinely created God-breathed image-bearing icon of the divine that also needs help. It is not changing who I am and what I am but it does admit that I have room to grow.

Now I know there's still something within us that does not like this word and honestly I almost started this year with a sermon series called Falling in Love with Sin Again because this word has been used so much to shame and abuse people that we have this hesitancy to use it but I think sin is still a helpful word defined properly used properly to describe what is wrong with the world.

We want people to admit when they're wrong. We want people to admit they have room to grow and to change. We want people to admit when they are either enabling or are complicit in systems of ableism and sexism and rape culture and systemic racism and white supremacy and consumeristic militaristic capitalism.

We want people to admit when they're wrong and all of those ideas have a word and it's called sin. Now there's lots of ways that sin is used within scripture.

[17 : 10] There are sins with an S the things that I do that are wrong either intentionally or by omission by not doing something and that's the idea of missing the mark that I'm aiming for something good but because of the crookedness within me I miss and I actually do something that harms or hurts someone else.

There's sin with a capital S and the way scripture the New Testament in particular uses this word is it describes a principality a power a supernatural force in the world that holds influence over societies and systems and governments and corporations and groups of people gathered together.

So there's the sins the individual kind of sins there's the capital S sin that power and authority that principality and then there's evil which isn't missing the mark it's not even shooting for the mark it is actually intentionally trying to harm and to hurt and to destroy and to bring violence into the world.

But notice how the gospels in particular the stories about Jesus talk about God's relationship Jesus' relationship with sinners.

Matthew chapter 9 verse 10 Jesus sat at dinner in a house with many sinners sitting with him. A couple verses later in verse 13 Jesus says I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.

[18 : 36] a couple chapters later Matthew 11 they called the religious authorities of the day they called Jesus a gluttonous man a drunkard a friend of sinners.

Luke 15 again the religious authorities grumbled against Jesus saying this man greets sinners eats with them. Luke 19 again religious authorities grumbled against Jesus saying he's gone to be the guest of the man who is a sinner.

If you didn't know any better it almost seems like Jesus likes to spend time with sinners. It almost seems like God in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth prefers his company with those who admit that they need help.

That they need some sort of divine assistance to grow and to change. when we think we're out of reach of Jesus' mercy that's precisely when Jesus comes reaching and looking for us and when we think we're no longer in need of mercy that's precisely when mercy becomes out of reach.

I'll say it again when we think we're out of reach of God's mercy embodied in Jesus that's precisely when Jesus in mercy comes looking for us and when we think we no longer need divine grace we no longer need divine help that we no longer need divine mercy that's precisely when it becomes out of reach mercy and grace and the divine presence is available to those who know they need it.

[20 : 18] So Peter says get away from me. I know we're in the middle of a lake but go for a swim Jesus you can't be in the same boat as me. I am a sinner sinner. I'm a sinful man and now listen to Jesus' response.

Jesus said to Simon do not be afraid from now on you will be catching people. When they brought their boats to him they left everything and followed him.

Now there are two different words in the Greek for catch. There's one that's specifically a fishing term. We see this in verse 6 when they let down their nets they caught so many fish that their nets began to break.

That's one kind of catch. But that's not the word Jesus uses here in verse 10. From now on you will be catching people. Here Jesus uses the word zo'greo zo'greo and it means to capture something alive.

It can also be used to mean rescue. To restore to life. To find someone that has been caught, captured, ensnared and to capture them back.

[21 : 28] To rescue them. That's what Jesus is inviting Peter into. Just like you caught fish you will be catching people but you're not catching them to keep them.

You're not catching them to ensnare and to entrap them. No, rather you are catching so as to rescue people. To rescue them and bring them into a new kind of life.

a life with God. And so when Simon and his business associates hear this invitation they leave everything and they follow Jesus.

Because there's something about this Jesus the Jesus who leaves behind the crowd multiple times leaves behind those who would press in on him and goes and finds those who feel like they don't belong.

Goes and invites those who feel like they can't even be in the same boat as this man. there's something about this Jesus that they say I want to be a part of that.

[22 : 26] So notice what Jesus has done. He's introduced himself. He's introduced himself into the life of Simon and James and John and Andrew. He's introduced himself and showed what he is about.

He's not about the crowd. He's about healing. He's not about fame and fortune. He's about seeking those who feel like they're ostracized and marginalized. He's invited himself. Peter, Simon, can I get into your boat?

Can you put out a little bit? There's a sense of invitation. I want to be part of your life, Simon. There's revelation. Jesus is slowly but surely revealing who he is to Simon and his associates that he is in control of healing and sickness and disease and can bring healing.

He is in control of nature and can bring an abundance of fish even to the failed fishermen. And then there's commissioning. But what Jesus is bringing to his disciples, to those who would follow him, is not merely an invitation to self-help.

It's not merely an invitation to growth. It's not merely an invitation to change. It's an invitation to go catch other people, to bring the divine mission of rescue and redemption to the world for the sake of others.

[23 : 35] Jesus wants Peter, Jesus wants all of his disciples to grow and to change and to imitate the life of Jesus for the sake of the world. So let me ask you just a few closing questions.

First of all, ask yourself, am I open to recognizing my own need for growth and change and transformation in my life?

Do I have a sense that I am not perfect, that I am undone, I am unfinished, and that I have a sense of trajectory and direction?

Do I recognize a need for growth and change? Number two, what holds me back from fully accepting Jesus' invitation to follow him?

What are the barriers, the things that whisper in my mind to say, no, this invitation isn't for you, a sense of guilt or a sense of shame or a sense of being told that you don't belong?

[24 : 39] Excuse me, what is holding you back from fully accepting that invitation? For some of you, you have been marginalized, you have been told that you don't belong, and so that Jesus' invitation to follow him, well, it's not actually for you, it's for all those other holy people.

That's a lie, it's a lie from the pit of hell, it's not true. Jesus' invitation is even for you. For some of you, you had that invitation and you were disenchanted, hurt, or abused by the church, by those who used that invitation to try to control you.

So now when you hear it, your little alarms go off in your brain of, is this another invitation to be controlled? But rather, Jesus says that where there is freedom, we are set free, that Jesus has set us free for freedom, that we are being invited into a life of divine freedom, which admits that there are things holding me back that I can now move forward into because Christ himself is inviting me forward.

Question number three, do I trust that Jesus will never stop inviting me to join my life with his life? There are voices in our minds that lie to us, that tell us that our past or our present makes us unworthy of Jesus' invitation, that God's love, that God's blessing, that God's triumph in our lives.

We don't deserve it, that it's a lie, that we need to exclude ourselves from the divine invitation. Don't think of yourself more highly than God.

[26 : 25] God is inviting you, God is saying that you are worthy to be part of this divine life, and that there is nothing and no one that can separate you from God's love. Don't put yourself in a position where you think that you are above God, wiser than God, and can tell God that no, actually you're wrong about this.

No, God is right about this. This invitation is for you. And question number four, as I seek to imitate Jesus, how will I cross boundaries to be with those who have been told they don't belong?

Jesus did not seek the crowd, Jesus did not listen to the crowd's demands, rather Jesus went to be with those who were told they didn't belong.

He went to be with those who believed that they didn't belong. Jesus crossed those boundaries, cultural boundaries, so he could go and tell them the good news.

What, how then will I respond to that? Will I be the same kind of person who doesn't listen to the boundaries that have been set up by our culture, or by well meaning, but in the end harmful religious folks, who have set up boundaries?

[27 : 41] Will I decide to ignore them and cross them so that I can tell others that Jesus is love, Jesus is invitation, the kingdom, the kingdom of God is for everyone?

God, would you pray with me? Holy Spirit of God, you, I believe, abide in each and every one of us.

That you are calling us to imitate the divine Christ. And so empower us, Spirit, for all of us to listen to Jesus' invitation, to be catchers of people, people who would be dedicated to bringing the divine rescue mission into the world, to bringing restoration and reconciliation to all things.

Give us concrete ideas of how we can hear your word today and bring it into fruition into our lives. We pray all of these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.