

REVOLUTIONARY LIVING LUKE 5:27-39

-- Read Luke 5:27-39

-- Pray

We presently find ourselves in a section of the Gospel of Luke—from 5:17 through 6:11—where Luke seems to be gathering together events from Jesus’ ministry that serve to answer an important, yet vexing question, which is this: “Why would anyone want to kill Jesus?” In the previous passages, we have been reading about the tremendous love, mercy, and kindness of Jesus, and we have been witnessing His miraculous capacity to heal both broken bodies and broken spirits. What joy! What glory! What hope we have seen! And, of course, this naturally begs the question, “Why would *anyone* want to kill somebody like that?”

Look ahead with me briefly, if you will, to chapter six and verse eleven. There, Luke’s concludes this collection of controversy passages. There, we can see just what the Pharisees were thinking about Jesus. There we become witnesses to the inception of the Pharisaical plot to kill Jesus. In that verse, we read, “*But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.*” What, then, is the deal with these Pharisees? Why are they so mad at Jesus that they want Him dead?”

Well, the collection of passages in which we find ourselves today is given to provide insight into the answer to this troublesome question. First, in 5:17-26, the Pharisees begin accusing Jesus of blasphemy because He claims the authority to forgive sins and then proves that unique authority by healing the paralytic. Next, in the passage we examined last week, the Pharisees are shocked and disgusted with Jesus because He freely associates with people whom the Pharisees detest and regard as the worst possible crooks and traitors. And now today, in verses 33-39, we see the Pharisees annoyance and antagonism toward Jesus growing yet deeper.

Why? What is it about Jesus that enrages them this time? I suggest to you today that the scandal of this passage is the revolutionary new way of life that Jesus sets forth in this morning's text. And this revolutionary brand of living severely cut against the grain of the demands of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law.

-- Video – True Joy

This video, I think, does a wonderful job of illustrating the alleged scandal of our text. And do you know what that scandal is? In the eyes of the Pharisees, I believe that the scandal they saw in Jesus was—Are you ready for this supposedly terrible truth?—joy... true joy.

How, you may ask, could true joy ever be a scandal? The scandal of Christlike joy has to do with the religious atmosphere in Israel into which Jesus entered, because it was largely an atmosphere of despair. Listen to how Jesus describes the religion imposed by the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law in Matthew 23:4: He says, *“They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”* And again in Matthew 23:15, Jesus says, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.”* That was the atmosphere of religion that the Pharisees were establishing in Israel, and there can be no doubt that true joy is a scandal to anyone whose religion creates “sons of hell” by imposing impossibly heavy burdens.

But all praise be to God that that is not the atmosphere Christ came to establish. Quite the opposite, in fact, for there is no despair in the true religion of Jesus Christ. Rather, He invites us to a revolution of joy for His great glory, and as we examine our verses this morning, I hope to point out at least three ways in which true Christian living is truly revolutionary, only one of which we will have time to examine today.

First, unlike the false and miserable religion of the Pharisees, revolutionary living in Christ is fun... That's right... Fun!

Having said that, allow me introduce this point with a brief disclaimer. We, of course, must realize that fun is not the *only* attitude of authentic Christian living. A simple overview of the life of our Lord will establish this point, because, at times, Jesus cried. In John 11:35, we see Christ weeping in response to the death of His friend Lazarus. At other times, Jesus grieved. Luke 13:34 tells of Jesus' heartache

over the doom He knew would come upon Israel in A.D. 70 due to their rejection of Him and His message. There He says, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”* Still, on other occasions, Jesus expressed righteous anger. In Luke 19:45-46 we see His reaction to state of the temple: *Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”*

However, with that disclaimer in place, know this: Jesus also had fun!

When we examine the Gospels, and in particular as we journey through the book of Luke, we are blessed to notice a particular characteristic of Jesus and His disciples that consistently perturbed the scribes and the Pharisees. Do you know what really befuddled them in our passage this morning? I think they were shocked by the amount of fun that the followers of Jesus were having. They were eating and drinking and laughing and fellowshiping. They weren't gloomy or uptight. They knew how to relax and rejoice in meaningful fellowship. In short, I think the Pharisees saw Jesus and His followers having a great time, and they didn't like it one bit.

Why not? Well, as I mentioned a bit earlier, these religious leaders didn't really believe in fun. In fact, as Jesus Himself declared, their idea of religion was a dreadful drag. The religion they established was a high pressure life of strict religious duties. In their attempt to obey God's Law, they attempted to build a giant, impenetrable “hedge” of strict regulations around it. They came up with all sorts of extra rules—far beyond what God required—with the hope that Israel would not be able to get anywhere near enough to the actual Law to risk breaking it. Thus, it was a life where every breach of the code, no matter how small, was vigorously pounced upon. In other words, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, whom we see questioning Jesus about fasting in verse 33, represented a high-and-mighty, group of self-righteous Jewish leaders who had thoroughly systematized every ounce of fun right out of religion.

For example, even though the Old Testament only required one day of fasting in the entire calendar year (on the Day of Atonement), these religious leaders believed and taught that a man was unrighteous if he did not systematically fast on every Monday and every Thursday. There was, of course, nothing wrong with fasting, but there was everything wrong with the reason *why* the Pharisees fasted.

God desires people who fast because they want to, not because they are forced to do so. God wants people who will fast for a heartfelt reason, not based upon some heavy-handed routine. But for the Pharisees, religion was a duty, not a delight. It was a persistent pain, not a profound privilege.

Jesus, on the other hand, repeatedly demonstrated that life He gives is fun. First, in verse 29 we see Jesus, and presumably His disciples, feasting with the “sinners” and the tax collectors—the crowd that the Pharisees despised, but those whom Jesus had come to save. This was a crowd that the religious leaders of that day were obviously not reaching, and yet they feasted with Jesus and many of them placed their faith in Him.

Why were the Pharisees so unsuccessful at reaching out to this crowd that enthusiastically flocked to Jesus? Well, while there are, obviously, many reasons, I suggest to you that one major reason was because joyless living is horrible evangelism. How many of us are attracted to boredom and gloom? How many of us are attracted to those who say, (in a melancholy tone) “Do you want to come to our church?” How many of us are interested in a lifestyle where legalistic routines drown out the voice of fun and squelch celebration?

Unhappy people make ineffective evangelists. Just listen to these lyrics from the popular Billy Joel song, “Only the Good Die Young”:

They say there's a heaven for those who will wait
Some say it's better but I say it ain't
I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints
The Sinners are much more fun...
You know that only the good die young

Now, I think that there were probably at least two things going on in these lyrics. First, if you listen to the entire song, it quickly becomes apparent that Billy Joel was sorely mistaken about the true nature of joy. It is also very possible that he was under the conviction of sin and was using this song to lash out at those whose higher standards heightened his guilt. However, it must also be said that Billy Joel, and a lot of other people like him, are clearly not very attracted to what they have seen in religion. It appears as though they see bored and uninspired people who, in their opinion, didn't know how to enjoy themselves. And, unfortunately, there is often substantial truth to this stereotype.

Or take the example of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who was a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court for 30 years. His mind, his wit, and his work earned him an unofficial title as “the greatest justice since John Marshall.” At one point in his life, Justice Holmes explained his choice of a career by saying: “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.” What message are we communicating with our lives? Do we give off the impression that life in Christ is the most genuinely exhilarating life of all, or do others look at us and think Christianity is a big bummer? There can be no doubt that joyless living is horrible evangelism.

In essence, revolutionary living in Christ tells us that it is a good thing to have a good time. In Ecclesiastes 8:15, we are given this exhortation: *“So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.”*

Now, of course, we must, once again, introduce this point with a disclaimer, because, in order to say this, we need to be careful what we mean by a “good time,” for the world’s idea of a good time is often vastly different than God’s. By “good time,” we cannot, for example, mean such activities as drunkenness, sex outside of marriage, or other debauchery. In short, it cannot refer to anything that diminishes the expression of God’s glory in our lives. Not only do these types of activities grieve God, but, in the end they never end up producing real joy anyway. They are, as the author of Ecclesiastes put it, “a chasing after the wind.” In Ecclesiastes 2:1, he writes, *“I thought in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’ But that also proved to be meaningless.”* // You and I have been created to worship God, and only in fulfilling that purpose will we find wholeness and true joy.

Therefore, as Psalms 5:11 declares, *“Let all who take refuge in [God] be glad; let them ever sing for joy.”* Let us heed the command of 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and *“Be joyful always.”* Or as Jesus preached, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). Jesus interacted with and ministered to people from every walk of life. They saw His joy, and they were intrigued. They witnessed his joy, and they wanted to know his secret; they wanted a taste of the happiness and delight with which He lived and preached. Whereas joyless living is horrible evangelism, the fun-loving life of revolutionary Christian living draws people to the Savior who is the source of matchless joy.

To conclude this point, let us take careful note of the title Jesus applies to Himself in verse 34: He refers to Himself as the “Bridegroom,” and He does so in order to compare the Christian life to a wedding feast. In fact, He makes this comparison on more than one occasion, and I believe is extremely significant that He does, because in doing so He reveals some invaluable truths about Himself and about the revolutionary life He came to offer.

Most notably for our purposes today, in this comparison we see the fun, joy, and celebration, of revolutionary Christian living, because there were few if any aspects of life in first-century Israel that were more closely associated with these blessed elements of living than the wedding feast. The wedding feast was then, even as it largely remains today, a time of fun and fellowship, in which a glorious new union between husband and wife was cheerfully celebrated.

- The fun and joy of our wedding day and reception
- The atmosphere of celebration in the reception hall as everyone waits for the bride and groom to arrive.
- The ultimate celebration that commences when the bridal party finally arrives.

This description of our wedding day is not altogether unlike the wedding festivals with which the people of Jesus day would have been familiar. In that day and place, the wedding party and guests would have typically gathered at the home of the bride’s father, and, with a wonderful spirit of joy and celebration, waited together. The big difference was that the bride would have been waiting along with everyone else, and they would have all been waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. In addition, first-century wedding feasts were usually week-long festivals, and the bridegroom’ arrival could happen at any time during that week. And while they waited, the guests of the bridegroom joyfully celebrated with fun and fellowship in eager anticipation of his arrival. Then, when the bridegroom arrived, the celebration was taken to a whole new level.

This is the image that would have come to mind here when Jesus calls Himself the “Bridegroom.” Let us not forget that, together as the church, we are described in Scripture as the bride of Christ. Through faith in Him, we have been united together with Him forever in His great glory and we are gladly awaiting His imminent return. We are the bride and He is the eagerly anticipated “Bridegroom.” Let us, then, always remember to wait upon our Bridegroom with the spirit of fun, fellowship, and celebration that characterizes the guests of a great wedding feast.

All of this comes together to teach us that joy and fun are essential characteristics of authentic Christian living. This is why Paul says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4). This is why, in His High Priestly Prayer Jesus prays for His followers, saying, “*I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them*” (John 17:13). This is an important reason why Jesus and His disciples are constantly feasting and fellowshiping with one another and with the lost people that Christ came to save, even though doing so disturbed the religious authorities of the day. You see, revolutionary Christian living calls to a life that is not afraid of fun. // Jesus Christ is united to us through faith, and He is returning to bless us forever. // Because of these glorious truths, we should rejoice and celebrate! How could we not?