

Luke 5:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Analysis

Jesus declares His mission: 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' The phrase 'I came' (Greek 'elēlytha,' ἐλήλυθα, perfect tense) indicates Jesus' consciousness of His incarnational purpose—He came from heaven on divine mission. His target audience is 'sinners'—those who recognize their condition and need repentance. The word 'call' (Greek 'kalesai,' καλέσαι) means to summon, invite—gospel call summons sinners to repent. Those considering themselves 'righteous' don't hear this call because they see no need. True righteousness comes through repentance and faith, not self-achieved moral performance.

Historical Context

The phrase 'I came' occurs repeatedly in Jesus' teaching, revealing His sense of divine mission (Mark 2:17, Luke 19:10, John 10:10). First-century Pharisees pursued righteousness through law observance, considering themselves God's favored ones based on their religious performance. Jesus' statement that He came for sinners, not the righteous, either meant

1. He came for those who acknowledge sin, not those claiming righteousness, or
2. ironically, since none are truly righteous (Romans 3:23), He came for all who recognize their need.

Either way, self-righteousness excludes from grace. Only those admitting sin receive forgiveness.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus' declaration that He came 'to call sinners to repentance' teach about the gospel's target audience and message?
2. How does Jesus' pattern of receiving sinners while opposing self-righteous Pharisees illustrate grace's paradox—available to all but received only by those admitting need?

Interlinear Text

οὐκ ἔληλυθα καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλὰ ἀμαρτωλοὺς εἰς
not I came to call the righteous but sinners to

G3756

G2064

G2564

G1342

G235

G268

G1519

μετάνοιαν

repentance

G3341

Additional Cross-References

Luke 19:10 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 15:10 (Sin): Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented.

Acts 3:19 (Sin): Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Luke 15:7 (Righteousness): I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Luke 24:47 (Sin): And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

2 Peter 3:9 (Repentance): The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Acts 17:30 (Repentance): And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 2:38 (Sin): Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 3:26 (Parallel theme): Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Acts 20:21 (Repentance): Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.