

Discussion Questions

September 7, 2025



Belong: Belonging Before You Believe

The central theme of this sermon is that Jesus modeled a radical form of welcome, inviting people to belong in His community before they believed the right things or behaved the right way. This “upside-down kingdom” approach stands in contrast to many cultural and even church models that require people to first “believe and behave” in order to belong. Our goal is to become a community that reflects the welcoming heart of Jesus to everyone we meet.

Scripture Discussion

The sermon centered on how Jesus interacted with those considered “sinners” and “outsiders” by the religious establishment. Let’s look at the key passages together.

1. Jesus Calls Levi - Read Luke 5:27-32 aloud.

Verse 27-28: Who were tax collectors in Jesus’s day? Why was it so scandalous for Jesus to call Levi to be one of his twelve disciples?

Verse 29-30: Levi throws a party for Jesus and invites all his friends (“a large crowd of tax collectors and others”). Why do you think Jesus was so comfortable “reclining” at the table with this group? What message did His presence send to both the “sinners” and the Pharisees?

Verse 31-32: Jesus says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” How does this statement challenge the Pharisees’ view of who God is for? How does it challenge our own assumptions today?

2. Jesus and Zacchaeus - Read Luke 19:1-7 aloud.

Jesus doesn’t just acknowledge Zacchaeus; he invites himself over for dinner. In that culture, sharing a meal was a sign of acceptance and friendship. Why was this act so offensive to the crowd?

The sermon emphasizes the timing of Jesus’s welcome. Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus before Zacchaeus made any public repentance or restitution (that comes later in verses 8-9). Why is this order—belonging before behaving—so significant?

Processing the Main Ideas

James shared the story of his son at baseball practice to illustrate how someone can feel like an outsider. In what ways can our church - our language, our traditions, our social circles - make a newcomer feel like they don’t belong? How does Jesus’ example challenge those?

Jesus warned His followers to “beware of the yeast of the Pharisees.” James described this as the “us vs. them” mentality that finds it easy to push people away and judge those who look, act, vote, or believe differently.

Where do you see this “pharisaical tendency” in your own heart?

How does social media feed this tendency today?

The sermon stated: “Welcoming people where they are at in their journey is not endorsing behavior or beliefs. It is not resignation or being loose with theology.” Do you agree with this statement? Why is this an important distinction to make? Where is the line between welcoming someone and affirming sin?

Jesus rejoices over sinners coming to Him and welcomes them without a "grace timer." How does this upside-down kingdom approach differ from the "Believe, Belong, Bless" sign mentioned? Why is the order of belonging first so important for transformation?

Application & Action

James finished with 3 different areas of application in growing in helping people "Belong before they believe": Heart posture, hospitality in homes & church culture.

For the heart: The challenge is to pray daily, "Jesus, give me Your eyes to see outsiders and break my heart for what breaks Yours." What person or groups of people in or around your life might feel like an outsider and leave you wanting nothing to do with them? What does it look like to posture your heart towards welcoming them?

For church culture: James challenged us to break routines on Sundays - look for newcomers or those alone, introduce them, and offer simple kindness. How can we do this in practical ways? What aspects of this are a challenge? Is there something you could do different that would be doable?

Luke 5:27–32 (CSB)

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." So, leaving everything behind, he got up and began to follow him. Then Levi hosted a grand banquet for him at his house. Now there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at the table with them. But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus replied to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Believe, Belong, Bless**Luke 5:27–28 (NIV)**

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:29–32 (CSB)

Then Levi hosted a grand banquet for him at his house. Now there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at the table with them. But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus replied to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Luke 19:1–7 (NLT)

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. 7 But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

Luke 7:34 (CSB)

..a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

Luke 15:7 (CSB)

..there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don't need repentance.

Romans 2:4 (NASB)

..the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

How do we help people belong before they believe?

1. It starts in our hearts:

- The pharisees' hearts were full of judgment & self-righteousness, Jesus' was full of compassion & love
- Pray a dangerous prayer: Jesus, give me your eyes to see the people you've placed in my life."

2. It moves into our homes:

3. It transforms the church: