

## THE PURSUIT OF A SINNER

### MARK 2:13-17

*13He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.*

*15And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." ESV*

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#### Introduction

I hold in my hand a copy of Keys Valley Baptist Church's Constitution and Bylaws. This is the latest and approved version.

This covers many important areas, concerning the governing of our church. It identifies our name and purpose, and details our Statement of Faith. It defines the terms of office for pastor and deacon as well as Church Membership and qualifications for membership.

I want to read to you Section 1.03 – Qualifications for Membership:

"A person, who has had and whose life evidences a genuine experience of regeneration through faith in and acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior; who renounces sin; who has been baptized in obedience to Christ following his or her regeneration; who endeavors to live a consecrated life wholly unto the Lord; and who agrees to submit to the authority of the church as set forth herein, may be presented to the church for membership."

There is a good reason for qualifications like these and I am in agreement with this paragraph. But, I think Jesus would have a much different list of qualifications...He doesn't include or exclude membership on the basis of our external actions, but on what those members may become.

It is so easy to see the sinfulness in others. But when the 'tables are turned' and we are met face to face with ourselves, what do we see?

Our view of our own sinfulness is at the very least critical. Many have an improper, unbiblical view of our own sinfulness. So how should we view sinfulness in ourselves and others? In today's sermon, Jesus is going to show us the correct attitude. The way we look at our own sinfulness, may in fact keep us from walking closer to Jesus, and even keep us from our own salvation.

Some of us are deeply aware of our own sinfulness. But another group knows they're a sinner, and at the end of the day, they just don't think they're that bad. And as a result of that, the free gift of salvation, "God's Amazing Grace" just simply isn't that amazing to you.

The first part of this chapter is that wonderful story of four friends who tear up a roof and let their paralytic friend down in his bed, in order that Jesus might make him whole. Some of the scribes were in the presence and did not like that Jesus had used the words, "Son, your sins are forgiven." They questioned that only God can forgive sins. Jesus confirms that He is God through his reaction both in word and deed.

*13He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.*

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Now we join Jesus as he walks along the Sea of Galilee from the city of Capernaum. The masses were still following, listening and making decisions concerning the "man and his message."

Jesus never missed an opportunity to teach those that would listen.

I wonder if the choosing of Levi, was a lesson He was giving to them, not in words, but in action.

*14And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.*

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What is the first thought that comes to your mind when I say "IRS?" For most of us, I would presume, I am sure that not many happy or positive thoughts entered your mind. Even if you have never been audited or hit with fines. There is something about a government collecting taxes or imposing laws in order to collect taxes.

It was no different for the Jews. But in their case, the Romans were the conquering nation imposing the taxes, not for streets, schools, parks, or schools. No it was for the coffers of the conquering nation. And to top it off, the Romans selected Jewish business men to become tax collectors.

The Greek word for a collector of tax or custom on behalf of the Romans is "publican." These tax collectors were contractors, and required to receive certain amounts in the name of Caesar. If they collected anything above that amount, they would keep it. That led to widespread abuse, extortion and

corruption, for these tax collectors. They were despised and hated especially by the Jews. They were considered lower than Gentiles...dogs.

The publicans were to receive custom or taxes from everyone. That meant that they would come into contact with Gentiles. That would ensure that they would always be ceremonially unclean.

Jesus looks at Levi (Matthew) and simply commands him to “follow me.” What an amazing story on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Emanuel invites one of the most hated of society to join Him. I would imagine that all those Jews that were following this young Rabbi to have second thoughts. Can you imagine the message as those farthest away from Jesus getting the message that Jesus was actually talking to a publican and inviting him to join Him? What about the thoughts of James, John, Andrew and Peter? Surely they had come into contact with Matthew as they all live in the same area. They would have paid custom and taxes to Levi.

What strength it must have taken for Levi to do exactly that...to leave the very place where he was contracted to collect money for Rome. Have you ever considered that Levi was breaking a commitment to the conquering nation? I wonder if people were standing in line to take Levi’s job. I wonder what happened to the custom that was on the table.

All we do know is that Levi, “rose up and followed him.”

*15And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.*

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Jesus and many of His disciples go to the house of Levi and is the custom they are served refreshments. There were others in attendance. Levi had invited other tax collectors to join him and this Rabbi.

Wow! Jesus not only invites the lowest of the lowest to join Him, but now he is being entertained in a house that has been built on theft and corruption.

*16And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

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It never fails. If you live a life for Christ, there will always be adversity. And many times it comes from the religious crowd, the church family.

I remember that we were in the beginnings of developing a children’s program at our church. Many of the church membership found a ministry here and the children’s program grew from on church

buss to 8 in less than three months. The small amount of kids from one buss was doable, but when the number rose from 35-40 kids to over 150, the cry came from the church body.

“These kids are destroying our new church building.” It was true that the building was less than a year, and with this much traffic, it was becoming more and more difficult to maintain.

“These buss kids are bringing in all the wrong elements. We don’t want our children to be exposed to some of the things these kids are saying and wearing.” Fights, swearing, lewd clothes were all part of the bargain for a children’s buss ministry.

On and on it went. The next business meeting was a real doozy. It was the general idea that the children’s ministry should be discontinued or at least bring it back to one buss. With some convincing, the buss ministry ran on Sunday afternoons away from the general congregation. Within weeks the numbers soared from 150 to over 350 kids receiving the Gospel message. Hundreds got saved...some becoming missionaries and pastors.

The scribes and Pharisees don’t like what they are seeing and ask Jesus disciples, “Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

I wonder what answer His disciples were ready to give or if they became tongue tied.

*17And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

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And then Jesus makes one of the most difficult statements in the whole Bible: “*And when Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”* (Mark 2:17 ESV).

There was no doubt that Levi was living a life of ease because of his greed and sin. Jesus approached Levi at the very “seat of custom” where he was a willing participant in greed and corruption. Levi and Jesus lock their eyes and Jesus says “I want you to give up this life, confess your sins and follow me.” Think about that. The Bible does not say anything about what was going on concerning Levi. Did he have a crisis of conscience? Were other words spoken by Jesus that cut right through to Levi’s heart that Mark did not record? We will never know.

My thought is that Levi had heard Jesus speak around the area and the Holy Spirit was working him over, when Jesus appears and simply says, “Follow me.”

Conclusion

Let us first remember that Jesus was teaching when Christ asked Levi to follow him. There is a message to all of us today. There is much more at stake in this passage other than Levi being called as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Like Matthew, Jesus lovingly pursues men to come to him, even in the midst of their sins. You don't have to clean yourself up before Jesus will take you. No you can come to Jesus just as you are and He will show and help you to clean up your life.

Jesus pursues the sinner. If you're saved today, you were the tax collector, and Jesus didn't save you because He looked at you and said that you have your act together.

Romans 5:8 says, *"But God shows us His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (ESV).

You were a sinner, you were an enemy of God, and the wrath of God was coming your way. But Jesus saved you while you were still a sinner.

Let's be honest today. Are we particular on who we invite to church? Do we look at the outside of a person and decide if they meet some sort of internal criteria for us to invite them to church or to meet Jesus?

*Bob Crowder*