



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Mark 2:13-22

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English Standard Version

“Eating and Fasting”

The 5th Sermon in a series on The Gospel of Mark entitled
“The King and His Cross”

Mark 2:13-22

*“He [Jesus] went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. ¹⁴ And 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. ¹⁵ And 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. ¹⁶ And 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?” ¹⁷ 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.”*

¹⁸ Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to Him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. ²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he

does, the wine will burst the skins — and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. Thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your hard teaching here. It’s hard in that we usually think we’re righteous, but we’re too easily revealed to be sinners. It’s hard because we’re forced to admit we need You. So help us to consider what it really means to follow Christ and to hear Your Word. Thank You that today we’re learning once again from John Mark, a follower of Jesus, as he brings us the earliest eyewitness account of the life of Christ. Help us to hear it, understand it, believe it, and obey it. And so we pray, speak through the Gospel of Mark this morning, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.

INTRODUCTION: A Funeral For A Mobster? ¹

Recently a controversy broke out online ... hard to believe, I know ... about a funeral and whether or not the gospel was proclaimed there. I took notice of this because the criticism was directed at my good friend, Ray Cannata, Pastor of Redeemer PCA in the Uptown section of New Orleans. Now, first of all, you have to understand that Ray is easily **the most stereotypical pastor in the PCA**. Whatever you think PCA pastors are like, Ray is it. And if you don’t believe me, just look at this ... [show slide] ... Ray is the Mayor of Magazine Street, a member of the Krewe of the Rolling Elvi where he leads their dance group, “The Jailhouse Rockers,” and the star of the documentary, *“The Man Who Ate New Orleans.”* Originally from New Jersey, Ray moved to New Orleans right after Katrina hit, and he fell in love with the city, its food, and its people ... the people who were the pillars, the problems, and everyone in between. At the same time, Ray became convinced that **1 Peter 2:17** is one of the church’s strongest evangelistic tools, *“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”* Ray is quick to remind you that verse says ... *“Honor Everyone!”*

This conviction led him to accept an unusual invitation: to perform the funeral for Kent “Frenchy” Brouillette, New Orleans’ most famous mobster, who had been stabbed to death by his roommate. “Saying ‘yes’ seemed like a problem,” Ray admits, “Saying ‘no’ seemed like a bigger problem.” So he agreed ... with some serious trepidation. “When the ceremony began, I said something like this: ‘Friends, you all knew Frenchy. You knew him in all his contradictions, his beauty, and his brokenness. Some of you knew Frenchy as generous. Some of you knew Frenchy with a bottle ... or a nail gun. The only One who knew the real Frenchy perfectly though ... was God. And God loved Frenchy deeply. We know this because God made Frenchy, God sent His Son to die for Frenchy, and God watched over and sustained Frenchy. That’s the only way we can explain how he survived this long. God created everyone with value and dignity, in His image. Frenchy hurt people. He also blessed people, or you wouldn’t be here. And in that way, he’s like all of us. I’m in no position to finally judge anyone else. But I know that no matter where we’ve been, God is always eager to welcome us home when we trust in Him. Some of Jesus’ closet friends were degenerate criminals, and He had a

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the article *“Mobsters and Misfits”* in byFaith, Fall 2019, page 32.

special affection for them, and a delight in giving them mercy when they knew they needed it. I don't know the eternal fate of Frenchy, that's not my job, I hope to see him in glory, though. But I do know that our eternal fate doesn't rest on being nice, on keeping rules, or on being respectable, but on trusting Jesus gift of eternal life. And that's the Good News for all of us today."

Afterward, Ray gave what he worried would be his last prayer and benediction, and then jumped in front of a second-line parade down Bourbon Street, "with the media there, with thugs and hookers and musicians and mobsters dancing down the whole length of Bourbon Street." After arriving at a bar at the end of the parade, Cannata says he got to know some of Frenchy's friends personally. "It might sound strange, but as the party went on, this misfit crowd became more and more beautiful to me. *'Honor everyone,'* the Apostle Peter tells us. We're all dumpster fires before God, and the more respectable you are, the harder it is to see it. But only when we embrace this can we *honor everyone*. It has to start with seeing our own need. In all the gospels, **it's always the broken that Jesus calls.**" We have one such story today.

In our text today, **Mark 2:13-22**, we have the story of a transformation from a **flawed life to a follower of Christ**. Christ saw in the flawed life of **Levi the tax collector** (as he's called in Mark and Luke) a broken, needy man, who came to be known as **Matthew, the Gospel writer and great evangelist**. Christ still sees broken men and women with an eye to what they will look like healed and whole. He sees in us what no one else sees. But this passage isn't really about us. And it's not even about Levi. Hopefully, it will become obvious who it's really about.

Now in this passage, Jesus is saying that "My message is absolutely and utterly new. It is absolutely and utterly different. It's different than the religion of the Pharisees. It's different than the religion of the past. My whole approach is **I don't particularly like self-righteous people. I like sinner's way more.**" This whole passage tells us what a real Christian is. A real Christian is someone who has been **called**, someone who is a **disciple**, and someone who has been made utterly **new**. That's what the passage teaches. What does it mean to be a Christian, a real Christian? A real Christian is someone who is **called**, someone who is a **disciple**, and someone who has been made utterly **new**. Let's look at this in more detail. What's a Christian? A Christian is someone who has had **the same experience as Levi** (otherwise known as **Matthew**). And so that's where we'll start, **Mark 2**, starting at **verse 13**, and the first thing we see is that ...

v. 13-14: YOU'RE CALLED BY THE KING ²

"He [Jesus] went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. ¹⁴ And 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."

Now let me say something that may be somewhat surprising to many of you — you're not a Christian unless you have, like Levi, **experienced a call**. **You're not a Christian** unless you're aware of having been **called**. Christianity is not something **you take up**. It's something

2 The Exposition of the text is largely adapted from my sermon, "The Calling of the King" preached at Potomac Hills on 6/16/13. And the sermons, "Christ Calls Us To Himself" 9/10/95; "Mercy, Not Sacrifice" 9/17/95; "Jesus' Meal with Matthew" 12/11/05, all by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, *The Tim Keller Sermon Archive*, Logos Bible Software 8.7. And the books, *Preaching the Word – Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* by Dr. R. Kent Hughes, pages 67-80; and *The Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew, Volume 1* by Dr. Dan Doriani, pages 377-388.

that **takes you up**. Let me say that again — Christianity is not something **you take up**. It **takes you up**. In fact, I would say this is one of **the main ways** in which you can tell you're on the right path. You have a sense of being worked upon. A Christian is somebody **who is called**.

Now what does that mean? First of all, we have to be very careful not to assume that means God **always works in the same way**. If you go back to the beginning of the chapter, which we looked at last week, it says Jesus came home. And we read ... **Mark 2:1-3**, "*And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And He was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men.*"

Now you have to see something here – it's important. On the surface, it looks like the way Jesus dealt with **the paralytic** and the way Jesus dealt **with Levi** are totally different. The paralytic had a bunch of friends. We're told they're trying to get into the house where Jesus was speaking, and there were so many people there they couldn't get in. So they went up on the roof, and, in Jesus' name, tore up the roof of the house, and they lowered him down.

So here's somebody who looks like he's doing everything possible to get to Jesus. The way Jesus meets Levi is totally different. Here's Levi. He's at work. Just imagine yourself. You're at the desk, and people are coming up to you, and they're paying you something. You're working on your ledger book, and you're saying, "Okay, Mr. So-and-so, Miss So-and-so, has given this amount." You're crossing names off the ledger. Suddenly, this guy shows up. "**Follow me.**" Levi's not after this. Levi's not looking for this. Levi's not praying for this. So you say, "Well, this looks like Jesus operates in a completely different way."

Well, first of all, this tells us we need to be careful about **standardizing** the Christian experience. We shouldn't do that. It's easy to think, "Because I came to Christ in a crisis, if somebody else didn't come in a crisis ..." You wonder. If you came because you did a lot of study and you came to Christianity through an intellectual experience, then you mistrust somebody who comes to it through an emotional experience. Some people feel like you have to walk forward in a service when a preacher makes an invitation. That's the only real way to do it. It's very dangerous to try to **standardize** anything about the Christian life from these verses. Yet there's something **in common** here, and that's, to be **called** means ...

- **You Sense Jesus Is In Charge.**

The first characteristic is to be **called**. You sense you're not the one who's actually in charge of this spiritual adventure. You sense there's an outside power that's in charge. Now somebody says, "Well, I can see that in the story of Levi. Here's Jesus coming in and **calling** Levi right in the middle of a workday, but that's not the way it seemed to work for the paralytic." Oh yes it was, just look. The paralytic **was not after the Jesus he found**. You see, the paralytic was after a faith healer. He thought Jesus was going to heal him. So he comes down, and there he is, lying on his mat. He looks up at Jesus, and what does Jesus say? "**Your sins are forgiven.**" "Wait a minute, that's not what I'm here for."

You see, Jesus is **in charge**. The paralytic **thinks** he is in charge, but he's not, Jesus is. The paralytic thinks he's the one seeking Jesus, but Paul says in **Romans 3** that no one seeks God. Anyone who's ever taken any kind of active spiritual search, if you ever find the real God, you will always and inevitably look back and realize you weren't actually **trying** to find the real

God. You had another kind of god in mind. You had a god who would do *this* and *this* and *this* and *this*.

Then you discovered that God very often uses that kind of search to find you. Whenever He finds you, you're brought up short. To be **called** is to experience an alien power at work in your life. If you **don't sense** that, if you **don't sense** somebody is after you, if you **don't sense** something is going on inside, if you **don't sense** that, eventually ... well, that's not real Christianity.

Once you learn some of the Christian faith, it gets very hard to go back if you're a thoughtful person. I remember talking to somebody a couple of years ago who really didn't want to be a Christian. The person didn't want to be a Christian because there were some lifestyle issues he wanted to pursue that Christianity and the ethical standards of Christianity wouldn't allow. He recognizes the truth of Christianity, but he doesn't want it. Because he realizes that it demands changes and he doesn't want to change. So he gets mad at Christianity, and at Christians, and at the church. **Because He Knows**. ... And there's a man who's being called.

In fact, to some degree, when a person gets mad at Christianity and sort of angry and feels like God's after them, I have more hope for them than a person who says, "Well, of course, I've always been a Christian. I've always come to church. It's sort of comfortable. I think religion is a private thing, and I don't think you should get too excited about it." I don't care how many Sunday school pins that person has. That person's **not called**. The person **struggling** is the one who's **called**. There's a sense of an outside force coming in and changing you. If you're a Christian, you sense there's **something different** coming into your life, and **that's Jesus**, and **He's in charge**. That's the first way you can tell you're **called**. The second way you can tell you're **called** is when you realize that ...

- **You are confronted with a person, not ideas**

Jesus comes and says, "**Follow Me**." He doesn't say, "Follow *that*." He doesn't say, "Follow *these*." He says, "**Follow Me**." The real Jesus is always talking about Himself. It's true. He says stuff like, **Matthew 22:42**, "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?*" *They said to him, "The son of David."* He's amazing, there's **a radical self-centeredness about Jesus**. If you look at the things He said ... "*... before Abraham was, I AM.*" "*I and My Father are one.*" "*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.*" He says, "*You must love Me and hate your father and mother,*" meaning, "The devotion you should have for Me is so much greater than the devotion you should have for anybody else, including your father and mother ... so much so that your devotion to your father and mother should look like hate compared to your devotion to me." Look at what He says about Himself. It's **radically self-centered**. Now what does that mean? The way you know you're being **called** is you're being confronted with **the radical self-centeredness of Jesus**.

Let me be as frank as I can. When people are investigating Christianity, I'm **never very patient** with this question. They'll say, "Well, I'm interested in Christianity. What is the Christian view of *this*? What's the Christian view of *that*? What's the Christian view of marriage? What's the Christian view of social justice? What's the Christian view of doing *this* or *that*?" I know what they're saying is, "I'm interested in Christianity, but I don't want it to be **too narrow**. I want to be able to live my life. Can Christians participate in these activities?"

And when you ask those questions, you're on the wrong trail, because the Bible says, "**First, First, First**, you have to decide **who He is** before anything else." Now over the years, I've had a number of people say, "What's the Christian view of homosexuality?" What they're saying is, "I'm interested in Christianity, but I want to know what your church teaches about homosexuality." Or they ask about evolution ... or the role of women ... or some other culture war issue. And with all due respect, **WHO CARES? First** you have to ask, "**Is Jesus Who He Said He Is?**" If He is who He said He is, **then He's the authority**. Then you can figure out what He teaches about those issues. Do you realize how ridiculous it is to say, "I want to know whether I like your view of the issues? ... Is Jesus Christ the Son of God? Is He the Savior of Sinners? Is He the Creator? Is He the Judge? Is He the King?" You have to work on **that first**. Once you settle the question of **authority**, then you can ask these other questions.

Let me put it to you another way. I've had people say, "You know, I'd like to be a Christian, but some of these Scriptures say you can't marry a non-Christian and all these sorts of things ..." You know what I want to say? I say, "Are you kidding me?" If Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Judge of the earth and He says, "I want all Christians to only marry Christians ..." I mean, a lot of people struggle a great deal with that. **So What?** That's nothing. So the next 10 to 50 years I have to live with that command? That's nothing if I'm going to rule and reign with Him forever. If He really is who He said He is, then He has a right to ask for that. Because He's the Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and King – Because He is wisdom itself – He can ask for anything." And the only wise response is "Of Course. Absolutely. I'll do what You say."

Could you say, "No, I want to marry whoever I want. Therefore, even though Jesus is who He said He is, even though He's the Son of God, even though He's the Judge of all the earth, even though He's the Savior who died for me, I can't come to Him." **Are you nuts?** What's the matter with you? You're not thinking clearly. Jesus says you're misunderstanding Christianity. **It's not a lack of faith. It's a lack of sense.** If Jesus is who He said He is, then the **only rational response** is to do what He says, **regardless** of what He says ... if He's **the King** of the world, **the King** of the universe, **the King** of all Creation, then the **only rational response** is to **follow the King**. And you follow by doing what He says.

If He's not Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and King, then of course, none of this makes any sense. With all due respect, if Jesus isn't the Lord and Savior, **who cares** what He teaches about marriage? **Who cares** what He teaches about sexuality? **Who cares** what He teaches about evolution? **First** you have to figure out **is He Lord, and Savior, and King?** He says, "**Follow Me.**" In other words, "I won't deal with you about anything else until you decide how you are going to deal with Me. I'm not going to tell you about anything else. I'm not going to tell you why your life went this way or that way. You decide who's the **authority** in your life. **Is it you or me?**" **That's the call.** Whenever I see people who just love to talk about theological issues or love to argue about creation and evolution or are fascinated with miracles and healing and so on, no offense, all these things are interesting and important, but that's **never the first thing**.

If the Holy Spirit is really after you, if you're really meeting **the real Jesus** who says, "**Follow Me!**" — You have to come to grips with that. You have to figure out **who He is**, and then you have to decide how you're going to relate **to Him**. Then after that, you can figure out what He teaches about **this** and **that** and what He'll have us do. You don't say, "Well, I'll come to Christ **IF** I like His agenda." You have to say, "**If He is** the Messiah, **if He is** the Christ, then

I have to get with **His** agenda. His agenda would be life for me because He's my Creator and Redeemer." **Either He is** your Creator and your Redeemer and His agenda, whatever it is, is life for you, **OR HE'S NOT**, and you shouldn't have anything to do with Him. Have you heard that **call**? Have you heard Him come after you and say, "**Follow Me**"? Maybe today is the first day. Maybe for the first time you're realizing, "Gee, Christianity isn't just about getting more religious and adopting a set of ethics. It's coming to grips with who's **Lord** of my life, who's **Savior** of my life ... me or Jesus? It's all or nothing." First, a Christian is **called BY** someone, and that someone is Jesus. Next the way you know you're **called** is because ...

v. 15-20: **YOU'RE CALLED TO THE KING**

Levi's life was revolutionized. So he decides to host a reception in Jesus' honor, but a disagreement breaks out in the middle of the dinner. Notice Jesus and the Pharisees use two words that are very curious, starting at **verse 15**, "*And 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.*"¹⁶ *And 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?"*¹⁷ *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."*¹⁸ *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"*¹⁹ *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.*"²⁰ *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."*

Now the reason this is curious is that elsewhere in the New Testament, both Paul and Jesus **reject** this way of talking about the **righteous** and **sinners**. For example, Paul says in **Romans 3:10**, "*None is righteous, no, not one.*" And in **Luke 18:19** we read, "*And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."*" Now if Jesus says that and Paul says that, why are they using these terms here? Because this is how the Pharisees talk. The Pharisees divide the world into good people and bad people. Levi is a classic example of bad people. Levi is a tax collector. Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the Romans, but they weren't hated just because they were helping the oppressors, but because they demanded bribes, lined their own pockets, and were corrupt.

It's classic for people to say, "Well, there are little sins and there are big sins. There are good people who do little sins. I'm a good person. I do little sins. Of course, nobody is perfect. 'To err is human, blah, blah, blah ...' **However**, then there are **the bad people** who do **the BIG sins**." Pharisee religion divides people between the good and the bad, between little sins and big sins. What are the big sins? Well, things like bribery and extortion. Traditionally, crime and sexual irregularities are big sins. So we see the bad people and the good people. The good people do things that are wrong, but they're little sins. Ah, but you say, "Yes, but I'm beyond that now. I'm a tolerant person. I live in Northern Virginia." But Pharisee religion is way more pervasive than you may realize. Pharisee religion is not just the way they operate; it's the way the heart operates.

I was reading an interesting article about what happened back in the 1950s. At the time Joe McCarthy was a United States Senator from Wisconsin. And Joe McCarthy was very much hated, all over the country, because he was going after people and accusing them of being a

Communist. And it mentioned in the article that Joe McCarthy was known sexual harasser of women. He was always grabbing and pinching his secretaries. He was always trying to embarrass them. He was always doing that sort of thing, but he was faithful to his wife. It says people tried very hard to bring Joe McCarthy down, but nobody ever thought about bringing up the issue of sexual harassment. Why? **Because back then, that was a little sin.** If you were faithful to your wife, but you harassed your secretaries, that was a little sin. Being faithful to your wife, **that** was important. Adultery was a **big** sin. Sex outside of marriage was a **big** sin. Sexual harassment was a little sin. **Now it's reversed.** **Now** sexual harassment is a **big** sin, and sex outside of marriage, not so much, won't keep you out of elected office.

Now here's the point. You may think, "These are big sins; these are little sins. I only do little sins. I don't do the big sins. They're the bad people. They're what's wrong with this world. I'm okay." This means the reason you do these things, the reason you stay out of big sins and you only have little sins is so you can say, "God owes me. I've made sacrifices. I've said no all over the place. I've just said no to this and that. I believe in traditional values. I've done all these good things. I go to church. I tithe. I fast. I do all these things, and therefore, God owes it to me to save me; God owes it to me to hear my prayers. God owes it to me. I only do little sins." And without actually coming out and saying it, the faith you're professing with these kinds of attitudes is that you think **you're better** than other people, you're bringing **your sacrifices**, the things **you've done**. You defend yourself by **your good works**, by your sense of being **superior** to others. You look down your nose at lower-class America, the rest of the world, the other side of the County, you see? You feel superior. Look at your hearts. The Pharisees were obvious. The Pharisees brought their sacrifices, literal sacrifices. They brought their animal sacrifices. They brought their tithes. They brought their offerings. They looked down their nose at everybody else, and they said, "God owes me a good life, because I have been better than other people." **Luke 18:11**, "*The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'*" The Pharisee was obvious, but **everybody does it ... everybody does it.**

And so to them, and to you, Jesus is saying, "Look away from your good works to the only good works that'll save you ..." And **what's** the only work that'll save you? "... **Me!** I've come. Here I am eating with tax collectors and sinners." What He's really trying to say is the only way you will ever get out from under the problems you have is to look away from yourself. "Don't look and see what **you have done**; look at what **I have done**. Don't look at **your sacrifices**; **look at mine.**" That's the thing that will burst the old wineskins. We're called **BY** someone, and we're called **TO** someone, and last, we learn that ...

v. 21-22: YOU'RE CALLED FOR THE KING

²¹ *No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.* ²² *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins — and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.*"

In ancient cultures the skins of goats were stripped off as nearly whole as possible and then partly tanned and sewed up to make a wineskin. Then the new wineskin would be filled with new wine. The natural elasticity and strength of the new wineskins would allow the fermenting wine to expand. But if you put the new wine into an old wineskin that was brittle and

inflexible, there would be no room for the fermenting wine to expand and it would burst the skin, and then both the wine and the wineskin would be lost.

Jesus tells us there has to be a change in the way you think about things. Why? Because what He is bringing is new. It is the new wine. When you put new wine into an old wineskin, the old wineskin doesn't have the flexibility. However, they, the Pharisees, represent the old, legalistic religion ... the old wineskin. And new wine, the Gospel of Christ, needs a new wineskin ... it needs a faith based on grace, not one based on laws and rules. Christianity is **new wine**. That's always the case with Christianity.

Look at Jesus Christ eating. Do you know what eating means? Eating meant so much more to them than it does to us. To sit down and eat meant to have **close fellowship** with somebody. To eat with somebody is to say, "Let's have a **personal relationship**." Jesus Christ eats **with sinners**. In fact, He says, "I **love** to eat with sinners." Now, are you like Jesus? How do you deal with moral failures? When people come and tell you about something they've done, where they've really failed, they've let themselves down, they've let God down, they've let your family down, how do you treat them? Are you impatient? Are you indignant? Do you say, "Why can't you pull yourself together?" Do they sense you really can't understand how they could have done such a thing? Even if you're not so insensitive to say, "You did what? How could anybody do that?" if that's your response, you're **self-righteous** in the sense that Jesus is talking about.

If you don't believe these same awful things live in your heart, then you don't believe you're a sinner like them. As a result, you can't be sympathetic, and you can't give hope to people like that. And people won't tell you their problems. People won't feel loved by you. You can't give them hope. You can't say, "Jesus runs to people like you. Jesus runs to the helpless. Jesus runs to the repentant. Jesus can't resist people who come to Him and open their hearts like this." Do you say that? Do they get that impression, or do they feel like you're kind of cold, you don't know what to do with people who do **that** sort of thing? How do you treat moral failures? That tells you whether you're a Pharisee or not. That tells you how much of a Pharisee still lives in your life.

Not just that, how do you deal with your own moral failures? When you let yourself down, when you fail and you're devastated and you can't face God and you can't face others and you can't face yourself in the mirror because you've failed ... again ... that's also a sign your old **self-righteous wineskin** hasn't burst? When you let yourself down, when you let other people down, do you beat yourself up? Knock yourself around? Do you know what that shows? That shows that Jesus **isn't** your Savior; **you're** your own savior. Your God has died. There's nothing more despairing than that. Your real Savior is in ruins.

If Jesus is your Savior, if you've transferred all of your trust to Him ... well, Jesus eats with sinners. That's the reason why the Apostle Paul says, **Philippians 3:7-9**, "*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*" Paul is saying, "I used to look to my righteousness. I used to look to everything that I had done, and I thought, 'This means God owes

me a good life.’ I now realize my only hope is to be found in Jesus’ righteousness.” It says, “... ***be found in Him ...***”

Jesus eating with these sinners is something that will knock you over if you really understand it. It means **no matter** what you’ve done, **no matter** who you are, the distinction that Jesus recognizes is not between the good and the bad. The more important distinction that divides people now is between **the proud and the humble**. That’s the one that counts. That’s the one that matters.

Are you willing to say, “Lord Jesus, I’m not worthy. You don’t owe me a good life. You don’t. You owe me nothing but wrath. ***God, be merciful to me, a sinner***”? The minute that happens, He rushes in to meet with you, eat with you, and be with you. If you say, “You owe me a good life,” the minute that happens, He says, “I haven’t come for you.” That’s real Christianity. That’s the gospel. That’s simple. And that’s profound. ***“For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*** And we all qualify. Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Thank You that You have given us a King, Your Son, our Savior. Thank You for giving us a picture of what it means to be a Christian. There are a number of us right now who probably don’t even realize we’re being called because our lives seem to be such a mess, but it could be You’re trying to teach us Your strength is made perfect in weakness. It could be you’re trying to get us to see our weakness, our need for You. So, Father, I pray the people here who realize they’re being sought by You ... would answer Your call. Father, some of us are seeking very hard, and we can’t seem to find You but, Lord, You will come to us if we say, “Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief. Show me Yourself.” Forgive us for our lack of faith, forgive us for being afraid to admit our sins and shortcomings, forgive us for the self-righteousness that drives people away, and work in each of us this year as we live with Mark, a follower of Jesus, as we hear what he hears, given to him by eyewitnesses of Christ. Thank You for this story of amazing grace. Thank You for the glimpses we get of Jesus in His mercy towards sinners like us. Give us, we pray, the faith to believe that we can do whatever Jesus asks us to do. Teach us to respond with a greater trust in You, and in Your Word, and in this Gospel, to draw us ever closer to Your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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1 Corinthians 1:26–31

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God

*chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*