

The Gospel According to Mark

He Came to Save Sinners

Mark 2:13-17

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Introduction

What kind of people did Jesus come to save? For most Christians this should be an easy question to answer. We know that Jesus came to save sinners and that all have sinned. But then the question becomes, how does this truth impact our lives?

Do we truly believe that God can save any sinner? And if we believe in the mission of Jesus to save sinners, are we taking the message of salvation to those who need to hear?

Jesus Calls a Tax Collector – The Call of a Sinner (2:13-14)

- **A corrupt profession** – To understand the weight of this account it's essential to understand what it meant in this culture to be a tax collector. These are Jewish men, working for Rome who are known for lying and stealing. They are traitors and thieves and respectable Jews had no fellowship with them.
- **Jesus calls Levi, a sinner** – In almost the exact way in which Jesus called His other disciples, now Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) to follow Him. Jesus calls a known traitor and thief as a disciple.
- **Levi's response – a changed heart** – In Levi's response we see the authority of Jesus and the effectiveness of His call. It's clear that when Jesus called, Levi's heart was changed. He was willing to leave everything behind in order to follow Jesus (Luke 5:28).
- **Application** – While every person is a sinner and equally in need of salvation, the call and response of Levi is a reminder of the power of Jesus to save any sinner and to change any heart.

Jesus Eats with Sinners – Association with Sinners (2:15-16)

- **A large gathering and formal meal** – After his conversion Levi hosts a large dinner party bringing together people from two different worlds: Jesus and His disciples and his friends of ill-repute.
- **A socially unacceptable situation** – Eating a meal in someone's home was a big deal and communicated friendship and fellowship. For Jesus to share a table with tax collectors and sinners was a shock to many and caused the religious leaders to grow in their distrust of Jesus.

- **The question of the Pharisees** – While the Pharisees ask a simple question, it's better understood as an accusation. They aren't curious; they're contemptuous. They are appalled that a man claiming the authority of God would reject social norms and dine with sinners.

The Reason Jesus Came – The Salvation of Sinners (2:17)

- **The sick need a physician** – Jesus begins his answer to the Pharisees with an analogy. Just as a doctor tends to the sick and not the well, Jesus has come to save (heal) sinners.
- **None are well** – Jesus appeals to the Pharisees with the categories of the sick and the well. But while He knew they thought themselves to be among the well, this is a false position. No one is well apart from Christ, but the Pharisees are blind to their disease and their need for healing.
- **Jesus came for sinners** – Clarifying the analogy, Jesus states His purpose clearly. The reason Jesus dines with sinners is because this is precisely who He came to save – sinners who recognize their need.
- **A warning to the self-righteous** – While the Pharisees may not have understood, Jesus was warning them of their own self-righteousness. In Matthew's Gospel this is clearer; Jesus is warning them of the futility of trusting in their religious works and their adherence to the Law. (Matthew 9:12-13; Hosea 6:4-6). (See also Luke 18:9-14)

Implications from the Text

- **A warning to those who trust in their own righteousness** – As American church attenders we can very easily find ourselves in the position of the Pharisees, trusting in our religious habits and looking down on those who are less pious. Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees should remind us of our own position as sinners and of the dangers of self-righteousness (both to ourselves and others).
- **A reminder of our call to take the message of salvation to the world** – While Jesus did not participate in or give license to sin, He did go out of His way to pursue sinners. We must be faithful go to those who need Jesus with the message of salvation. We must avoid sin but we must not avoid sinners who need salvation.
- **A promise that all who repent and believe will be saved** – The conversion of Levi and others in this passage is good and helpful reminder: All who repent and believe will be saved. In Christ we can be forgiven and we should share this message of forgiveness with others.