

"Tax Collectors and Sinners"

Mark 2: 13-17

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Background

Join us on Sunday as we continue our sermon series “Jesus is Good News.” This Sunday, we’ll look at Mark 2:13-17 and see Jesus call another one of his disciples to follow him; Matthew (or Levi) the tax collector. This story will reveal some important truths about the way God sees us, how we are called to see others, and how we can practically begin building community and belonging into our communities with people who need to experience the grace, forgiveness, and mercy of Jesus. See you Sunday!

Sermon Text *Mark 2: 13-17*

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- What is the best thing you heard on Sunday?

2. Sunday Questions:

1. **Seeing Beyond Surface-Level Judgment** The sermon highlights how Jesus intentionally "saw" Levi at the tax booth, recognizing his underlying brokenness and openness when society only saw a corrupt agent of the Roman Empire. How do our personal, political, or social biases cause us to write off certain individuals or groups as "too far gone" for God's grace? What practical habits can help us look past outward appearances and actions to see others as God sees them?
2. **The Costly Nature of Surrender and Following Jesus** Unlike the fishermen who could return to their nets, Levi's decision to abandon his tax booth meant forfeiting a highly lucrative position with almost no chance of turning back. What security, status, or comfort might Jesus be asking you to lay down in order to follow Him more fully? How can we evaluate whether Jesus is truly the re-orienting priority in our daily schedules and choices?
3. **Radical Table Fellowship as Ministry** In ancient culture, sharing a meal signaled deep acceptance and identity, which is why Jesus dining with tax collectors and sinners scandalized the religious leaders. How can we intentionally use our regular meals or host gatherings to build genuine bridges with neighbors and outcasts outside our faith circles? What cultural or personal barriers prevent us from extending this kind of unconditional hospitality?

4. **Confronting Spiritual Self-Righteousness** Jesus responded to the Pharisees by noting that the healthy do not need a doctor, demonstrating that self-righteousness blinds us to our own need for spiritual healing. In what subtle ways can religious habit, moral uprightness, or spiritual knowledge lead us into self-sufficiency rather than surrender? What does it look like in practice to invite Jesus to submit our hearts to the "Doctor's knife" daily?
5. **Cultivating Mercy Over Empty Performance** Drawing on Matthew's inclusion of Hosea 6:6 ("I desire mercy, not sacrifice"), the sermon emphasizes that religious rituals are meaningless if our hearts lack genuine love for God and active mercy toward neighbors. Where are we in danger of settling for "morning mist" devotion—going through religious motions without true heart transformation? How can our community practically express God's mercy to those who are hardest to love?