

Series: The Disciples of Christ

LEVI

MARK 2:13-17

Text:

Introduction:

This takes place in the city of Capernaum.

The Lord had achieved the status of a celebrity in that town.

Everywhere He went the people flocked to Him to witness His miracles and to hear His message.

In this particular passage, Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee and the people of Capernaum flock around Him to hear what He will say and to see what He will do.

On one level, the ministry of Jesus is doing very well.

The common man is excitedly following Jesus as He ministers. But, conflict is beginning to develop between Jesus and the religious leaders.

They were already offended by His actions:

Mark 2:5-12

⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of*

the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. ⁶ But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? ⁸ And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? ⁹ Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? ¹⁰ But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) ¹¹ I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. ¹² And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

In those verses, Jesus made His identity as God in the flesh very clear. The Jewish leaders are now watching Jesus, trying to find some reason to attack His ministry. They are looking for fault and they will find plenty about the Lord Jesus and His work that they do not like.

Beginning here, and continuing through Mark 3:6, there will be a series of scandals involving the Jewish religious leaders and the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be scandals over Jesus and His relationship to Sinners; scandals over the Sabbath; and scandals over certain

Sacraments. These scandals will end with the Jewish leaders looking for a way to put Jesus to death.

Note:

1. THE PUBLICAN

Mark 2:14

¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Note:

A. Levi the Man

As Jesus walked along the shores of Galilee, He passed a man named Levi who was working at the booth where taxes were collected.

Since Capernaum was on the caravan route between east and west, a lot of trade traffic passed through the town.

Taxes were collected on everything that passed through the town.

Taxes would also be levied against the fish that were caught on the Sea of Galilee.

Levi had probably collected taxes from Peter, James, John and Andrew.

Levi was a tax collector. He worked for the Roman government, collecting taxes for the empire.

The Romans came up with a tax quota for each province in the empire.

They allowed their nobles to bid on the contracts for collecting the taxes in each area.

These nobles usually hired locals to collect the taxes.

As long as they met their quota, Rome didn't care how much more they collected.

As a result, the tax collectors became very rich.

See Luke 19:2

Luke 19:2

² And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

Publicans like Levi were dishonest.

Because Levi was a tax collector for Rome, he was among the most despised people in Israel.

He was viewed as a traitor to his people and to his nation.

As a tax collector, he would have been isolated in the community.

He would not have been allowed to go to the Temple or the synagogues.

He was a social outcast, who could only socialize with other tax collectors.

He was a hated man in Capernaum.

The man we are introduced to in these verses is a wicked man. He is defiled, despised, disillusioned, and he is a disappointment.

Note not only Levi the Man but also:

B. Levi and the Master

As the Lord passed by, He issued a simple command to Levi, "Follow Me!"

It is a call for Levi to leave his old life behind and to begin a new life of following the Lord.

Why would the Lord have any use for a man like this?

There is only one word that can answer that question: grace!

In spite of his occupation; his lifestyle; his failures; and his sin; the Lord loved Levi and He called him to a new life.

Before we move deeper into these verses, there are a few lessons here that I need to comment on:

- No one is beyond hope

I am sure that most people in Capernaum had given up on Levi. The good religious people of the city snubbed him as they passed by and wrote him off as a lost cause. Jesus, however, knew that his life could be salvaged. He loved him in spite of his past and his problems and He delivered Levi from the bondage of his sins and gave him a new life. No one is beyond the reach of our redeeming Lord.

- The Lord knows who to reach our wayward loved ones

The Lord, knew where he was and He knew how to reach Levi. One word from the Master and Levi's life was changed forever! The Lord knows where your lost loved ones are and what it will take to reach them. Never give up! In His time, and in His Own way, He will touch them for His glory!

- The Lord sees the potential in the lives of the lost

The Lord saw something in Levi that no one else could see! This man would be given a new name after he was saved. He would become known as Matthew.

Matthew 9:9

⁹ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

He would be a faithful follower of Jesus; he would be used to write a Gospel, and he would give his life for the Lord Who saved his soul.

Remember:

It's impossible to know what is happening in an individual's heart.

I get the idea that, along with all of Levi's other problems; he was disillusioned and disappointed with his life. When Jesus called him, he did not hesitate, but he left everything to follow Jesus.

Levi gave up more to follow Jesus than did the rest of the disciples. The others could go back; Levi made a clean, permanent break with his past.

Luke 5:28

²⁸ *And he left all, rose up, and followed him.*

Note not only this Publican but also the:

2. PARTY

Mark 2:15

¹⁵ *And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.*

This verse paints a strange picture. The Lord Jesus is invited to Levi's house for a dinner.

On the one hand you have Jesus and His many followers.

On the other hand, you have Levi and his friends and associates. The Bible calls them "publicans and sinners."

Some of those present were other tax collectors, and some are called "sinners".

This word was used to refer to prostitutes and to those who did not observe the strict religious rules of the scribes and Pharisees.

This dinner was attended by the people Levi knew and worked with.

They were his friends and associates.

The “publicans and sinners” were the only people who would have anything to do with him. But, that is about to change!

Note:

A. The Purpose for the Party

Levi hosted this party as an opportunity to say farewell to his old life and as an opportunity to introduce his friends and associates to Jesus. His life has changed and he wants everyone else to know it.

He wants his friends to meet Jesus. He wants them to experience the same change of life that he himself has experienced.

Note not only the Purpose for the Party but also:

B. The Picture in the Party

This verse finds Jesus in a setting that few so-called good people would have been. When you think about the people who were invited to that dinner, you get an idea of the atmosphere. There were tax collectors and

rank sinners there, and where you have sinners, you have the potential for sin.

The Lord did not partake of their wicked ways, but He did not isolate Himself from sinners either. He spent time with them in an effort to win them.

What a contrast to the church! We build our buildings, erect our walls, put up our signs and sit back and wait for the lost to come in. That is not what the Lord did! He went where the lost were. He won their confidence and He changed their lives.

You see, we really aren't carrying out the Great Commission when we build a church and start having services. We are carrying out the Great Commission when we take the Gospel into "the highways and the hedges" and "compel" the lost to come to Jesus.

May the Lord help us all become more like Jesus! May He give us a heart to win the lost at any cost! May He help us to go to the lost, where they are and take the Gospel to them, so that some may be reached.

Note not only the Publican and the Party but note also:

3. THE PROBLEM

Mark 2:16

¹⁶ And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

Notice:

A. The Critics

Not everyone was thrilled by our Lord's decision to have dinner with a bunch of sinners. The religious leaders used this as an opportunity to attack the Lord Jesus.

Do you what our problem is? It is the same problem that these people had. It is called hypocrisy! We are in trouble spiritually when we think we have reached a place where we are better and more righteous than others.

Note not only the Critics but also:

B. Their Criticism

The critics tried to make matters seem worse than they were. The verbs "eateth and drinketh" are in a tense that could be translated "always eating and drinking."

They wanted to make it seem like Jesus spent all His time with sinners. They tried to make it sound like Jesus was a sinner as well.

The scribes and Pharisees attacked the Lord for spending time with sinners. Their criticism was really a compliment! I thank God that Jesus is the Friend of sinners! Thank God He came to seek and to save the lost! Thank God that Jesus didn't allow the criticism of a bunch of religious hypocrites to deter Him from His mission!

Note not only the Publican, the Party, and the Problem but lastly:

4. THE PRONOUNCEMENT

Mark 2:17

¹⁷ When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

When the Lord heard their criticisms He did not allow them to go unchallenged. In fact, the Lord makes a bold pronouncement that will define His approach to reaching the world.

Note:

A. The Lord and His Mission

The Lord tells His critics that He is like a doctor. He is treating the sick and trying to help them get well. What kind of a doctor refuses to help sick people?

The scribes and Pharisees are like a lot of religious people in our day. They were willing to sit back and wait for the lost to come to them for help. Jesus, on the other hand, was making house calls! He went to where the sick were; He reached out to them!

Note not only The Lord and His Mission but also:

B. The Lord and His Message

When the Lord answered the criticism of these men He also leveled a criticism against them, but I don't think they recognized it. Jesus tells them that His mission, His ministry and His message was not for good people, but for those who are bad. He reminds them that He did not come for those who are well, but for those who are sick.

The scribes and Pharisees could not see their own sins. They could see the faults of everyone around them, but they could not see that they needed help too. They believed that as long as the outside was clean, the inside didn't matter.

Close:

When William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army, felt the call of the Lord to go into the streets of London and begin ministering to street people, he stood in a Methodist Conference meeting and requested permission from the presiding bishop to be released from his church to go into the streets and preach. The bishop heard the request and denied it telling Booth that they would not waste a man of his education and talent on the people of the streets. Upon hearing this, Booth sat down, resigned to defeat. His wife was seated in the balcony, because women were not allowed on the first floor. She stood up and leaned over the rail. She called to her husband and told him to listen to God and not to man. She vowed to stand with her husband against every foe. She came down from the balcony, Booth took her by the arm and they left the building to go into the streets to win people to Jesus. He was ready to quit, but his wife, a lady who usually stayed in the background, stepped out of the shadow of her husband to hold up his arms at a critical time in his life!

Many souls were saved and lives changed in England and around the world because William Booth and his wife were willing to cross the line to reach the lost.

Maybe the Lord is calling you to cross the line to reach someone for His glory. Today would be a good day for you to get busy doing what He has called you to do! He wants His Gospel taken out of the church into the places where the lost live. He wants us to reach out to them where they are.

Maybe you have been guilty of judging others by your own standards. Isn't it time you started reaching out to sinners and stopped looking down on them? Isn't it time you repented of your own hypocrisy and asked the Lord to give you a heart like His?