



THE GOSPEL OF

**MARK**



## Sermon Series Notes

“Lessons on Evangelism & Church Fellowship” (Mark 2:13-17)

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Intro: It is important to remember what we learned from last week’s story, because it plays a part in living out the lessons in this week’s story. Summarize the scene in Mark 2:1-12.

- ***Jesus is GOD.***
- ***Jesus has authority to forgive sins.***
- ***Forgiveness is man’s greatest need.***
- ***God longs to forgive us.***
- ***When God speaks, it is done.***

Read Mark 2:13-17.

v.13 Luke 4:16 tells us that teaching was Jesus’ custom.

Everything about this story is radical: Sweeping, far reaching, major, drastic.

### ***Levi’s Radical Response To Jesus***

Can you imagine being at your desk one day, or at the factory, etc., and Jesus comes up and simply says, “Follow me.” To get up at that moment and go with Jesus would be radical. A little background on Levi’s situation here will I think be helpful for us. Jesus did not tell Levi to turn in his resignation as a tax collector before he began following him. We know that Levi would ultimately permanently leave his job as a tax collector and become one of Jesus’ twelve apostles, but clearly not all tax collector’s in this day were required to quit their jobs in order to follow Jesus. Tax collectors came to John the Baptist and asked what they should do in response to John’s message to repent, and he did not tell them to quit their jobs, only to stop being dishonest in their work (Luke 3:12-13).

Pretty much all tax collectors in this day were dishonest. They typically worked for “publicans.” You might be aware that Scripture links “publicans” with tax collectors & “sinners.” A publican was one who secured a territory for the Roman authorities to ensure

that everyone in that region paid their taxes. Publicans would then hire tax collectors to do the foot work for them. The publican had a quota to meet according to how many Roman citizens lived in his area. All he cared about was meeting his quota. So the tax collectors under him had what would be considered tax franchises within the publican's domain. They also had a quota to collect based on the total for the region. Once they figured out what each person owed, they would "pad the price" and pocket the overage. Some tax collectors became very wealthy, and based on this party Levi hosts, it appears he had done pretty well himself.

Because of their greed, dishonesty, and service to the Roman government, tax collectors were a despised bunch. The last thing a mother wanted revealed about her son is that he had become a tax collector, especially if his name was Levi. Levi's name tells us something about the natural expectation his family would have had for his life. The Levites were the Israelite tribe called to the priesthood. He was expected him to become a priest. What he actually became was about the furthest thing from his parent's wishes as possible. Levi son of Alphaeus, also called Matthew, was a tax collector.

And of course in this culture people were known by whose child they were, so everybody knew Levi as the son of Alphaeus. So Levi's occupation brought shame to both his mother and father, and his family as well.

Tax collectors were barred from being witnesses in court, & were not allowed to attend the local synagogue.

Here is a guy who is accustomed to being shunned by his family, former friends, pretty much everyone except his fellow tax collectors. He is also a guy used to being told where to go, as some people would no doubt do so after reluctantly coughing up the required revenue and handing it over to Levi the tax collector. But here it is not someone telling Levi where to go, but someone bidding him to come. Zaccheus, a chief tax collector, was shocked when Jesus came up to the tree he was in and invited himself to his house. Zaccheus had never been treated the way Jesus treated him, and Jesus' actions were instrumental in Zaccheus becoming a follower of Christ.

The fact that Levi followed Jesus so readily tells me that he was already somewhat familiar with Him.

Ancient inscriptions discovered in Israel reveal that at some point the Romans actually had a tax on fish. I find this very interesting, because some of Jesus' first and foremost followers were fisherman. Could it be possible that Levi actually knew Peter, Andrew, James and John? Could it be that he collected taxes from them for the fish business they were all in? If so, there were no warm fuzzies between them and Levi.

Whether Levi was familiar with these fisherman followers of Jesus I don't know, but I'm convinced Levi knew something about Jesus, His teachings, as well as His followers, before he became a follower himself.

Levi's decision would dramatically alter his life. And one has to believe at least some of Levi's friends, associates, and family are wondering what in the world has happened to him. I mean, his commitment to Christ means he can no longer make the kind of money he was making. His immoral lifestyle would have to change. As a matter of fact, everything about his life would have to change, because to really follow Jesus requires that kind of commitment. Peter writes about former friends who not only cannot understand this kind of radical religious commitment, but because of it now mock and criticize.

1 Peter 4:3-4 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

But Levi's decision to follow Jesus is not the only radical thing in this story.

### ***The Radical Actions of Jesus & His Disciples at Levi's Dinner Party***

Luke 5:29 tells us that this was a great (megas) banquet (feast), a confident clue that Levi had done very well in his tax collecting franchise. There is little doubt that Levi had thrown parties often, but this one is like none he's ever hosted before. Luke tells us that this party was "for Jesus" (Luke 5:29). When Jesus is the guest of honor at a party, it changes the character of the party. If Levi was drinking at this party, he was making sure he was not overindulging. And if any female guests were present who in the past would have enjoyed Levi's personal hospitality toward them, at this party that was a thing of the past. You see, all the followers of Jesus at this party are enjoying the party, and the fellowship with one another, but with Jesus as the guest of honor, practices of the past that would have been the norm for this kind of get together are now taboo. And it is not because they are trying to follow some religious standard, it's simply because their lives have been impacted by the love, acceptance, & forgiveness of one human being unlike any they have ever met.

Quite a party, 'eh? There is an atmosphere of love, acceptance, forgiveness, grace, & mercy. But if you were there, despite the fragrance of these virtues permeating this party, you could also smell a rat. The teachers of the law who were Pharisees were there, and they have a concern - no, a complaint. Their complaint is not that the clientele of the party is fellowshiping with one another, but that Jesus is fellowshiping with them. His disciples are breaking yet another strictly held Jewish religious practice of the day, that of not associating with tax collectors and sinners, especially over a meal!

See p.221, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary

The Jewish religious leaders had defined holiness down to 613 specific commandments, or religious rules. There were 365 don'ts and 248 dos. It's interesting to me that there were far more don'ts than do's. It's still that way with religious legalists today. The Jews had their religion down to almost a science – the way to dress, where to go and not go, what to eat and not eat, who to hang out with and who not to, etc. Those who followed the

religious practices of the day became an extremely exclusive group. So for Jesus, a respected rabbi, & His followers, to be at Levi's house socializing with many "tax collectors and sinners" was to them anathema (an abomination).

So we have a radical decision by a tax collector named Levi to become a follower of Jesus Christ, and we have some very radical actions by followers of Jesus at a party at Levi's house.

### ***Radical Lessons From The Story***

*To follow Jesus requires a radical departure from your present lifestyle.*

See Luke 14:25-27; This might also include a radical departure from a religious lifestyle that has up to now deceived you into thinking that everything between you and God is OK.

*Healthy people are the most difficult to reach with gospel.*

Unless you see your need for a Savior, you cannot be saved.

v.17 A careful comparison of Scripture confirms for us that Jesus did not at all mean that the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were healthy, only that they did not see themselves as sick. Jesus said to them on one occasion, "Because you claim you can see you are blind." See also Matthew 21:31b-32; chapter 23.

William Booth founded The Salvation Army. In the early days of his ministry, the first converts were thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, & drunkards.

*The church is not meant to be an exclusive religious club.*

We must beware of becoming comfortable with the relationships we have developed in the church and forget that we are called to reach out to those who the Lord wants to add to his family.

*The basis for our righteousness must be the only basis for our fellowship.*

William Booth bringing all kinds of people into a church one day (see message notes on James 2; Hughes, pp.88-89).

See Gal.2:11-13

Group in Israel that would not share communion with the rest of our tour group.

I'm not so sure Peter, Andrew, James & John were initially excited about welcoming Levi into their discipleship band. If there was any kind of business relationship between them, this would have made it especially challenging, but just the fact that Levi was a tax collector was enough to make it difficult.

Have you ever thought of the hodge-podge of people that make up followers of Jesus Christ? See I Cor.6:9-11.

Note: I Cor.5:9-11; To have a meal with someone is intended to be an intimate part of fellowship (Rev.3:20).

*We should approach evangelism the way Jesus did, and the way the NT gives example and instruction to.*

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

I had lost my passion to share Christ with people I come in contact with. But the Lord has renewed my passion for personal evangelism. Keith Wheeler helped urge me on even more. I had my testimony shortened into a tract kind of format so I can pass them out to people I meet. I take them to BG when I go squirting. I was able to give some to two bikers who were staying in the same hotel with me last weekend in Ormond Beach.

Jesus had a mission, and as his followers He has given us a mission. (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15).

Biblical instructions & examples for effective evangelism:

- Pray for the Lord to open doors for you to share (Col.4).
  - Jesus' regular practice of prayer was the key to where He went and what He did daily. It was the Father, through the Holy Spirit, leading and guiding his life. And so it was through prayer that he ended up in Samaria sharing with a woman at a well, in Tyre sharing with a Syro-Phoenician, in the Decapolis sharing with a demon-possessed man, and at a tax collector's booth run by Levi son of Alphaeus, etc.
- Throw a Levi party
  - Levi's party was an opportunity to reach people with the gospel.
  - Illus: Your son or daughter argues their reasoning for you to allow them to attend a particular party because Jesus did so.

- Jesus does not condone sin by his association with sinners. Don't use Jesus as an excuse to allow bad company to corrupt good character.
- Practice relationship evangelism
  - Lloyd Pulley's book, other evangelism books I have in my office.
  - Jesus was not a self-righteous bigot. One of the reasons Jesus was so good at catching men is because he befriended people, all kinds of people. He was accused of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners.
  - When you look for opportunities to associate with unbelievers, do so with other committed Christians, so that you will not be led astray. Jesus sent out his disciples 2 by 2.
- Be willing to associate and reach out to all men.
  - Don't use the excuse of staying holy to keep from associating with and reaching out to the unsaved. I understand that bad company corrupts good character, but that does not apply to Levi's dinner party. Of course there were those present who were not followers of Jesus, but the core of the dinner party was made up of followers of Jesus, including the host!
  - There was a self-righteous attitude by the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law toward their own fellow Jews who were tax collectors and sinners, but there was also a self-righteous attitude of even Jewish tax collectors and sinners toward those who they considered worse sinners than themselves - the Samaritans, for example. And then there were outright bitter enemies of Israel like the Ninevites. Summarize the story of Jonah.
- Learn to be a chameleon for Christ (I Cor.9:19-23).
- Be willing to go out of your way to reach people with the gospel.
  - Some people are fishing in a religious aquarium. I wonder what % of church growth is due to Christians reaching unbelievers in their world verses reaching people from another church? I understand there are lost people in other churches, but what about the majority of people out here that never darken the door of any church?
  - The Samaritan woman at the well, Phillip & the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul the apostle, etc.
  - William Booth – "Some want to live within the sound of church and chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."
  - Get involved in an outreach ministry of the church (prison, JDC, downtown, etc.).

## INVITATION

Radical departure from the old life?

Personal commitment to share Christ

Relationship evangelism (and don't be a legalist)

Welcome new converts into the church (small groups, etc.).