

Mark 2:13-17

Calling Matthew

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Introduction

Man's works can never earn salvation. Our best works are so contaminated by our sin nature that before a holy and perfect God they appear as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Our salvation cannot lie in our works, but in only in God's grace.

When works get added to grace it becomes legalism and focuses on the external works and accomplishment of an individual. Legalism becomes a standard where one judges others by themselves. The ultimate end of legalism is that it rejects true righteousness. This is seen in how the religious leaders rejected Jesus (God Himself).

2

Introduction

In today's passage, we will see that Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him. Being a tax collector, Matthew was despised by the Jewish culture. Being rejected by the "religious" leaders and their influence upon the people, Matthew would have been compelled to associate with fellow outcasts. When he became a follower of Jesus, he left everything behind and wanted to share his new relationship with his friends. This sets up a conflict in the minds of the people. Can True Righteousness associate with sinners?

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Mark 2:13-17

Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. ¹⁴ As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. ¹⁵ Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. ¹⁶ And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

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Calling Outcasts

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Last week we saw Jesus' return to Capernaum. The crowds pressed upon Him until there was no room in the house or by the doors. We saw how the paralytic was brought by his friends and how they creatively found a way to get through the crowds to bring him to Jesus. We saw Jesus declare the man's sins forgiven and demonstrated His ability to forgive those sins by physically healing the paralytic. As with with leper, Jesus' "fame" would have continued to draw out the multitudes. Here we find Jesus once again leaving the cities and preaching by the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' purpose is the teach the people, so as the "large crowd" came to Him, He took the time to teach them. In the Gospels, many of Jesus' teachings were in the wilderness and/or by the Sea of Galilee.

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In our passage "Levi" or Matthew is a tax collector. Notice that he is in a tax collector's booth. Tax collectors were hated. When Rome wanted to tax an area, they would determine how much that wanted from a given area. Rome would then allow people to pay that money up front. In doing so, they purchased the right to collect tax from the people with a profit. These people would then hire others to collect the taxes usually on a percentage of what they collected. Tax collectors were dishonest and extorted from the people. Of tax collectors, Levi was the worst, because as a Jew, he sold out his own people for power and favor with Rome.

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To collect the taxes, the collector would set up a booth on a well traveled road. These booths were often protected by Roman soldiers. As the people passed by, the people were forced to collect the tax.

The passage does not tell us where Jesus and the disciples were heading, but as they walked along, they saw Levi at the collection booth. Jesus' words were simple – "Follow me."

Matthew must have had some acquaintance with Jesus. Like Peter, James, Andrew, and John, he turned his back on a lucrative career.

Mark states that **"he arose and followed him."**

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Too much of modern Christianity reduces Jesus to something we add into our lives. He becomes the power to help us obtain our goals and desires. It implies that we can spend our lives living for all the things of this world – its pleasures, power, prestige – its sin.... Just as long as you prayed some magical prayer, go to church once in a while, put a dollar in the offering, and if you speak nicely to a homeless person you are supposed to be ok. No real faith is needed
This is false teaching.

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This invitation offered to Matthew and the earlier disciples still resonates today.

We are told to pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Luke 9:23

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

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Truth is that Jesus is not just something to be added to our lives, or some magical power source to fulfill your dreams and fantasy. He saved and purchased us with His blood – we belong to Him – literally! He is our Master, our Boss, our Savior and Hero.

We now live our lives for Him. He does give us the Godly desires of our hearts and there is no greater joy than serving Jesus. But make no mistake it is not to be something added, He is the foundation that changes everything. Paul put it this way:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Just as the disciples left all to follow Jesus, we also must be willing to give up that which we cannot keep to gain that which we can never lose!

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The Community of Sinners and Outcasts

Mark 2:15

Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.

Matthew left all to follow Jesus. As a tax collector, he was viewed as the worst of sinners and would have been barred from the synagogue. Though rejected by man, Matthew found himself accepted by God.

Jesus and His disciples (perhaps others that were following “for there were many”) were invited to Matthew's house. As a tax collector, Matthew's sphere of friendship would have been limited to others like himself. In the Pharisaical religion of Jesus' day, to associate with such sinners would deem a person unclean and unfit for community worship.

Matthew had discovered acceptance from Jesus and wanted his friends to share in that experience. For Jesus, I am sure that He took the time to share and teach.

To many this must have been scandalous, but Jesus knew that He would not be defiled by His association but offered the opportunity for sinners to find forgiveness and redemption.

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The Contempt of the Self-Righteous

Mark 2:16

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”

The scribes and Pharisees were also following Jesus. Their motives were to find fault with Jesus rather than learn from Him. When they saw Jesus eating with these whom they considered sinners and beyond redemption, they found their reason to accuse and reject Jesus and attempted to undermine His authority with those who followed Him.

The term “eats and drinks” lets us know that this was a dinner and when Jesus set down with these outcasts it communicated, openness, acceptance, and friendship. The self-righteous were simply legalists who judged people by the exterior rather than the heart. In reality, these people pronounced themselves righteous on the basis of their external works, while looking down and judging others for not living up to their self-imposed manmade standards.

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The Condemnation of the Savior

Mark 2:17

When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Upon hearing the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus answered them with a stinging rebuke of His own. He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Matthew explains that Jesus also said, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice’ ” (Matt. 9:13). Putting the accounts together, it is evident that Jesus’ answer consisted of three parts.

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First, Jesus used a medical analogy to illustrate the nature of His ministry to sinful people. The Pharisees would have agreed that tax collectors and sinners like Matthew were spiritually sick. Such sinners were in need of spiritual critical care. Jesus’ illustration exposed the calloused hearts of the Pharisees, because they would have preferred that He shun sinners instead of helping them. The Lord’s analogy also exposed the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, by underscoring that only those who recognize they are sick seek out the help of a physician. Those who think they are healthy see no reason to go to the doctor. Because the Pharisees had deluded themselves into thinking they enjoyed spiritual health, they saw no reason to seek the physician.

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Second, Jesus answered the Pharisees from the Old Testament Scriptures.

According to Matthew 9:13, He told the scribes to “**go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’**” The phrase “**go and learn**” was a rabbinic expression used to rebuke foolish ignorance. The power of that phrase would not have been lost on the scribes, who were rabbis themselves. The biblical quotation “**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice**” comes from Hosea 6:6, and establishes the truth that God is more concerned with a merciful heart than with the hard, hypocritical observance of external rites (cf. Prov. 21:3; Isa. 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:8).

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Third, Jesus reiterated the purpose of His ministry, by declaring, “**I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.**” In other words, the Jesus’ mission to save was not directed toward those who were self-righteous but toward those who knew they were not righteous. The Pharisees, of course, regarded themselves as righteous. Consequently, they arrogantly assumed they did not need to repent (cf. Luke 15:7). Their self-delusion resulted in a fatal misdiagnosis of their spiritual condition. In their own minds, they were holy. In reality, they were more lost than tax collectors who knew they were rejected by God.

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So What ...

Legalists view themselves and spiritual and holy by their own definition and look down in judgment on those they deem unworthy. The heart of the matter is no difference than prejudice. It is important to see things not from our own viewpoint, but from Gods. Jesus identified all people as sinners, especially the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matt. 23).

Blinded by their self-righteousness, they were unwilling to acknowledge their true condition. Holding tightly to the notion that they were righteous, they denied their need for a Savior and subsequently rejected the Messiah. By contrast, the gospel message is for those who recognize and admit that they are not righteous. That is why Jesus' ministry focused on those who were well aware of their own desperate condition.

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So What ...

The good news of the gospel is that God receives unworthy sinners. Forgiveness is not granted to people who are good enough to earn it but to those who know they are not and repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The "scandal of grace" is that God saves those who do not deserve it (cf. Rom. 5:6–11). There is nothing a sinner can do to earn eternal life. All one can do is cry out to God for mercy, and by grace alone, He saves them (cf. Luke 18:13–14). The kingdom of salvation opens its doors to those who mourn over their sin and hunger and thirst after the righteousness they know they do not possess (cf. Matt. 5:3–6).

How about you?

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