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Mark 2:13-17 Jesus Calls Levi and Eats with Sinners

**Discussion:** What do we think makes a person “holy” in the eyes of God? What could we do to become even *more* holy?

Mark 2	Matthew 9	Luke 5
<p><b>Jesus Calls Levi and Eats With Sinners</b></p> <p><b>13</b> Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <b>14</b> As he walked along,</p>	<p><b>The Calling of Matthew</b></p> <p><b>9</b> As Jesus went on from there,</p>	<p><b>Jesus Calls Levi and Eats With Sinners</b></p> <p><b>27</b> After this, Jesus went out</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.</p>	<p>and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, <b>28</b> and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.</p>
<p><b>15</b> 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.</p>	<p><b>10</b> While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.</p>	<p><b>29</b> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.</p>
<p><b>16</b> 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?”</p>	<p><b>11</b> When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”</p>	<p><b>30</b> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”</p>
<p><b>17</b> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.</p>	<p><b>12</b> On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.</p>	<p><b>31</b> Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.</p>
	<p><b>13</b> But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’</p>	
<p>I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”</p>	<p>For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”</p>	<p><b>32</b> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”</p>

### Comparison

- Jesus is in Capernaum, Mark adding that this is by the edge of the lake.
- In Mark and Luke, Jesus sees *Levi* at a tax collector's booth, while it's *Matthew* in the other gospel. The story similarity suggests this is very likely to be the same person.<sup>13</sup>
- Luke suggests it was more than *dinner*, but a *great feast* thrown for Jesus by Levi.
- Matthew inserts the extra phrase "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (quoting Hosea 6:6).

### Context

- It is not unusual for NT characters to have multiple names, i.e. Simon/Peter, Saul/Paul, John/Mark, plus others that are less certain.<sup>14</sup> However, those are usually where a person has a Semitic name as an alternative to a Roman or Greek one. Levi is not mentioned again anywhere in the NT. Perhaps Jesus gave Matthew that name, in the same manner he gave to Simon the nickname *Peter*. Matthew has the meaning "gift of God".
- Levi was not a *tax collector* of the Roman poll tax itself (even though he is seated at the tax collector's booth), but more likely a customs officer working alongside others to demand customs levied upon goods in transit, with proceeds destined instead for the unpopular Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.<sup>15</sup> Even so, he is still included with the tax collectors and sinners, a disreputable company, association with whom would lead a person to ritual uncleanness, and indeed render any house unclean that they visited.<sup>16</sup>
- The typical method of feasting was to recline on pillows at tables, and eating a meal with others implies acceptance of them as friends and brothers.<sup>17</sup>

### Key Points

- The scribes in this case also happen to be Pharisees. Their concern is around issues of purity, and how Jesus would become unclean by his association with those guests at the feast, a scandalous outcome.
- Jesus is performing a symbolic act that indicates he is offering them entrance into the Kingdom of God.

## Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

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- If these tax collectors and sinners are “the sick”, the Pharisees ought to be acting as physicians, ministering to these people. Instead, they have become focused on maintaining their own righteousness by ensuring that the correct rituals and sacrifices are carried out, distancing themselves from anything that could render them unclean. Ironically, Pharisee means *separated one*. Jesus says that those who are truly righteous (i.e. right with God) have no need of a physician as they are already in the Kingdom. Jesus came for the sick; the Pharisees have the wrong approach (Matt 9:13).<sup>18</sup>

### Summary

Not only can Jesus forgive sin, but he has also actually come for the sinners so that they too might be welcome into his Kingdom. The Pharisees believed themselves to be secure, the holiest of people and therefore guaranteed a place in God's Kingdom.

Instead, Jesus offers the onlooking Pharisees an example of how they ought to be behaving, which is to minister to the sinners, helping them towards the Kingdom, whereas they have only their own ritual purity in view.

**Discussion:** How do you see the quotation by Jesus of “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (quoting Hosea 6:6) being applied in today's culture and church, and in our own lives?