Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Scandal of Grace
Scripture: Mark 2:13–17
Code: 41-9

Well you can open your Bible to Mark chapter 2 as we continue our study of this wonderful account of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mark chapter 2, we're going to be looking at verses 13 to 17, but we're not going to get there for just a minute. I want to set it up a little bit in your thinking.

One of the things we always like to do is to think biblically, to get back into the context of Scripture and sometimes that's a bit of a transition. Sometimes trying to get us out of this world, the way this world thinks and the way things exist in perspective in this world may be very different from the ancient world. And sometimes we can make the contrast to help us back into biblical mind set. Let me approach that this way.

Let's imagine for the sake of illustration that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior, the Messiah had come into the world in our time, to our country in the year 2009. He had come for the reason that He came then, to be a sacrifice for sin. If indeed He had come at this time in this place, to die, He would have been killed for the opposite reason that He was killed in first century Israel...the very opposite reason.

Then and there in first century Israel, He was rejected, He was despised, He was hated and He was murdered. And the reason? He was not religious enough. That was the reason. By standards of the Jewish religious leaders, predominantly the Pharisees, He was not holy enough...if holy at all. He was not righteous enough, if righteous at all. He was not demanding enough, He was not legalistic enough, He was not condemning enough. He was not tolerable...intolerant enough. He was not judgmental enough. He was not separatistic enough. He was sub-par to a dominantly religious world view.

Now if Jesus came today to our country in our time, He would be way too holy, far too righteous, too demanding, too legalistic, too condemning, too intolerant, too judgmental and far too separatistic. And our generation would kill Him for that...the very opposite, two different perspectives, two different societies in two different times. Our culture is highly secular and extremely immoral. Their culture was highly religious and extremely moral.

We would hate Jesus for condemning good people. They hated Him for forgiving bad people. The Jewish leaders very soon into our Lord's ministry began to develop a deadly hatred for Him. The motive was the very thing I just said, He was not holy enough. In fact, He was so unholy that they

conclude that He did what He did by the power of Satan. He was so unholy that He was energized by hell itself.

They condensed this viewpoint down into a mantra and they called Him with scorn, "the friend of sinners." That was the worst they could say about Him. That was the most scornful epithet they could come up with. The friend, in fact, of tax collectors and sinners. We will read that in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34.

Why did they conclude that? Because He seemed so welcoming to the people who were sinners. He seemed so comfortable with the people that they deemed to be Satan's people. And so the ultimate scorn that they could heap on Jesus from the perch of their sanctimonious self-righteousness was that He was the friend of sinners. He cannot possibly be the Messiah if He has a lower standard of righteousness than we do, if He has a lower standard of separation, legalism, holiness, etc., etc., than we do. He can't be the Messiah.

This was the problem. Jesus wasn't even as loyal to God, to the Law of God, as they were, how could He possibly be their Savior? In Luke chapter 7 and verse 36, "One of the Pharisees was requesting Jesus to dine with Him. He entered the Pharisee's house, reclined at the table. There was a woman in the city who was a sinner, a prostitute, no doubt, an immoral woman, and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and began wiping them with the hair of her head and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him. But she is a sinner.'"

Unthinkable, absolutely unthinkable that He would come close to a sinner or allow a sinner to come close to Him. In the fifteenth chapter of Luke, "All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near Him, to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

This was the issue that led to the rejection of Jesus. The outrage was t he one who claimed to be the most holy and the most righteous, Son of God. The one who claimed to be the Lord of heaven and the Messiah was comfortable with sinners. Separation defined the Pharisees. Never were they willing to be in the company of sinners. In fact, the rabbis used to say, "You don't even go near a sinner, even so much as to teach that sinner the Law." The parable of Luke 18 where the Pharisee and the tax collector go to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stands and prays like this, to himself, by the way, it says. "God, I thank You that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." There was nothing but disdain for sinners, the category of sinners. Jesus was so comfortable with sinners.

In a word, my friends, this was the scandal of Jesus' life. This was the scandal of His ministry, He was the friend of sinners. You can call it the scandal of the friendship of sinners, or you can call it just the scandal of grace. Jesus welcomed penitent sinners and Jesus rejected impenitent self-righteous Pharisees.

Now, of course, this is the glory of the gospel, is it not? This is the glory of the gospel, that God receives sinners. That's the glory of the gospel. Paul lays that out in the heart of the letter to the Romans. In chapter 3, for example, and verse 25, it tells us that God made Christ a propitiation through His blood, that provides a sacrifice that satisfies God, received through faith, it says, through faith. Verse 26 adds then that God becomes the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Justification, or salvation, comes to the one who has faith in Jesus.

Down in chapter 4, verse 5, it says, "He justifies the ungodly because His faith is credited as righteousness." So God justifies the one who has faith, who recognizes that He is Himself ungodly. God justifies the ungodly who has faith. Chapter 5 of Romans, verse 6, "While we were still helpless, at the right time Jesus died...here's the key verse...for the ungodly." He didn't die for the godly, He died for the ungodly. He justifies the ungodly. That's the gospel.

The glory of the gospel is not that God gives salvation to the people who earn it, or He gives salvation to the people who achieve it, or the people who are good enough, or righteous enough, or holy enough, but He gives salvation to the ungodly and the unholy and the unrighteous who believe in Christ and repent. This is the scandal of grace and it scandalizes every works/righteousness system in existence. It is the difference between the true gospel and all other religions.

Now the passage before us focuses on the scandal of friendship with sinners. This gets us really to the core, the essence of the gospel. Let's begin in verse 13. Speaking of Jesus, it says, "He went out again by the seashore and all the people were coming to Him and He was teaching them. As He passed by, He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax booth and He said to him, 'Follow Me.' And he got up and followed Him. And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house...Levi's house...and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many of them and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, 'Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?' And hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Therein, dear friends, lies the scandal of the gospel, the scandal of grace, the scandal of friendship with sinners. It is all summed up in that final statement at the end of verse 17, "I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." The only people who can enter heaven, the only people who can be

received by God, the only people who can be received into His glorious Kingdom, the only people who are given salvation are not the people who earn it, but the people who are self-defined and divinely defined sinners. He justifies the ungodly. That's the message of the gospel.

He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 5:32 where the same story is recorded in Luke 5:27 to 32, says, "He came to call sinners to repentance." He can save only sinners who repent and believe in Jesus. By the way, the story is also included in Matthew 9:9 to 13, it's an important enough account that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record it because it gives us the essence of the glory of the gospel.

Now remember the last verses that we looked at, verses 1 to 12, gave us the account of the man who was healed of paralysis. You remember his friends lowered him through the roof. They took the roof apart and dropped him down into the house, probably the house of Peter and Andrew where Jesus was teaching and Jesus healed him and more importantly Jesus forgave his sins. Said, "Your sins are forgiven," which threw the Jewish leaders into an outrage because only God can forgive sin, and since Jesus did forgive sin and proved He was God by healing the man, they should have affirmed that He in fact was God and did what He had the right to do. But that story, verses 1 to 12, gives the account of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. Now the next story, the one I just read, tells you whose sins He forgives...whose sins He forgives. He forgives the sins of those who are self-confessed sinners. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

So the essence of believing in Christ is believing, first of all, that you are a sinner, hopeless, not redeemable by any of your own works. That's a hard sell to people steeped in works/religion. That's why when Jesus preached that same message a little before this, Luke 4 records the account in the town of Nazareth, they tried to kill Him. The first sermon He tried to preach in His hometown, they tried to throw Him off a cliff. They weren't about to acknowledge themselves as sinners and He was speaking in the synagogue. People in the synagogue weren't sinners, they were righteous, they were holy in their own minds. They had bought into the Pharisees apostate form of Judaism...the religion of works and righteousness by human effort.

This has always been the gospel message. We're very familiar with it. The Christian faith is not for good people, it's for people who know they're bad. Salvation is not for people who think they are righteous, it is for the people who know they're not righteous. It's for people who hunger and thirst after righteousness, not people who think they've achieved it.

So our Lord's gospel ministry as any gospel ministry since is concentrated on those who know they are sinners, admit they are sinners, desire forgiveness and turn to Christ, the only source of forgiveness, the only one who has the right to forgive. Well in apostate Judaism in the first century where you earned your salvation, this kind of grace, this friendship with sinners was an outrage and threatened, really, to bring their whole system down, it was so opposed to it. So they hated Jesus

and they're already early in His ministry formulating a way to get rid of Him before He brings the collapse of their system down on their heads.

We learn then in verses 1 to 12 that He has the authority to forgive sin, and here we learn who it is that He forgives. Now let's get in to the story.

First of all, with the call of Levi...the call of Levi. A little bit of a background in verse 13, "He went out again." He went out of what? Well He went out of the house that He was in when He healed the paralytic. That's in Capernaum, His headquarter town, the town where Peter and Andrew lived and had a house...most likely He had been in that house teaching, doing healing miracles, and there it was that He healed the paralytic who came down through the roof. He went out again by the seashore, again because He did this very, very often. Much of His teaching was outdoors because they couldn't confine the crowd to a house and that was the reason He left the house on this occasion. It was already so jammed they couldn't get the man who was paralyzed anywhere inside the house, that's why they lowered him through the ceiling, and Jesus left the house not to avoid the people but so that the crowd could get larger. He left the house with the purpose of going by the seashore, literally along the lake edge, the Lake of Galilee, and all the people were coming to Him and He was teaching them. That is the reason He left the house. He went out of that house, along the Lake shore to a place with no boundaries, where all that wanted to come could come. This, of course, was what He wanted to do back in chapter 1 verse 38, let's go somewhere else to the towns nearby so that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for.

And what did He preach? Back in chapter 1 verse 14, it says, "He came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." That's what He preached. He preached the gospel of salvation and forgiveness of sin, the gospel of the hope of heaven, the gospel that involved entering in to the Kingdom of salvation, the Kingdom of God. He did what He always did, He preached salvation through repentance and faith in the gospel...faith in Him. So that's what He was doing and He went by the lakeshore as He did many, many times because more people could come.

Now, He has something in mind, however, as this event subsides, it appears as though He moves back toward Capernaum. It tells us in verse 14, "As He passed by...as He moved away." He's leaving the scene by the lakeshore where He has done this teaching and no doubt had done some healing as well. Back in chapter 1 verse 39, He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons. So maybe even that very event on the lakeshore involved healings and the casting out of demons as well as teaching because He under-wrote, as it were, or gave credence of His message by the power of His miracles over t he physical world and the supernatural world, disease and demons. So He did what He did all the time.

And when it was done, He moves away. And then the story gets very interesting. He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he got up and followed Him.

Now this is shocking. This is really, really shocking, because this one is a tax collector. This one is a tax collector. This is scandalous beyond comprehension. No self-respecting teacher of any kind would want anything to do with a tax collector. It would literally be the biggest stain on anyone's career to have a follower and an intimate who was a tax collector. That was the worst of the worst, the dregs of human society in Israel.

Now the proximity of these two stories leads me to believe they happened in sequence. Luke 5:27 says, "After that..." Matthew 9 verse 9 says, "Passed on from there." So immediately after the healing of the paralytic, He goes down to the shore, He does the teaching and immediately as He heads back to Capernaum, He walks by this tax booth and He does the unthinkable. If by chance some tax collector became a follower of a teacher, the teacher would do everything he possibly could to get rid of him. No self-respecting teacher, no self-respecting person would want to call a tax collector into his intimate company. No self-respecting person would want a tax collector as a friend.

But Jesus was different. Jesus shattered all the stereo types. As He goes back toward Capernaum, He passes the first toll station. Very possibly, kind of a major toll station on the road from the tetrarchy of Philip which was a small tetrarchy, or the region of Decapolis, a little further south and east, into the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. And when you cross the border into that tetrarchy or the category where Herod Antipas rules, there's a tax station there, like a border tax station. This would be the main road from Damascus, a great city in the east, through Capernaum headed toward the Mediterranean, and right along that road there was a tax booth.

The Romans dominated that part of the world. They literally ruled by shear force and power in the land of Israel. There were some puppet kings like Herod Antipas and Philip. They were beholding to Rome for their position and they were in league with Rome, so perhaps a combination of the Romans and Herod Antipas worked the tax system in the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas.

The way it worked was, Rome offered tax franchises and they were sold to the highest bidder. So you had to have some money to get one and once you got one, it was just a way to make a fortune. Now sitting in this tax booth is a man named Levi. He is named, obviously for one of Jacob's sons, a son born to Leah, so he's Jewish, obviously, which means he sold his soul to the Romans for money. The Romans are idolaters, the Romans are hated by the Jews. They are Gentiles, they are unclean. They despise them. There's a general hatred for Herod Antipas as well because he's a non-Jew. And here is someone who has sold his soul to these Gentiles, these unclean for the sake of extorting money out of Jews.

If you were a tax collector, you were the worst of the worst of the worst. Now this man, his father's name is Alphaeus, we don't know anymore about him. That's a common name. Two of the disciples had a father named Alphaeus, but it's such a common name, it wouldn't be necessarily the same Alphaeus. But you don't know this man is Levi, you know him as Matthew because in the account in Matthew, Matthew writing the account in Matthew, calls himself Matthew.

How did his name get from Levi to Matthew? I don't know, we don't have any record in the Scripture. My guess is that Matthew changed his name. I mean, if you had been a tax collector, it might be good for your future to alter your identity. It might save your hide. And if he did choose his own name, he chose well, it means gift of the Lord...for he had been given a gift of the Lord in the gift of salvation.

So this is Matthew. In all the accounts which list the Twelve, there is no Levi, there's only a Matthew. Now Jesus comes along, sees this guy named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and I just want you to see how cryptic this is. He said to him, "Follow Me." That's it. That is it. I mean, there's no explanation. There's none. You know, it's the same as we saw back in chapter 1 verses 16 to 20, follow Me, I'll make you fishers of men, and they left their nets, followed Him.

Going a little further, He came to James and John, did the same thing. They went away, followed Him. Just this "follow Me," they drop everything, they follow Him.

Now this is an explicit command and it is immediately obeyed. The commands assume something. What it assumes is that Jesus knows his heart, right? John 2:25, "Nobody needed to tell Jesus what was in the heart of a man because He knew what was in the heart of a man," omniscience. He knew it was in his heart.

Now remember, Capernaum is Jesus' home base. This guy's a high-profile resident of Capernaum. He has heard Jesus preach. He's well aware of His power, well aware of His message. It has found a place in His heart. He is a repenter by the work of God. He is a believer by the work of God. He has a heart that the Lord has changed. Jesus knows that. This is an illustration of omniscience. And He says, "Follow Me."

Now I can tell you this, Matthew must have been shocked, he must have been absolutely shocked that this Jesus knew what he desired, and the response? He followed Him. Luke 5:28 says, "He forsook everything." Now if you had been a fisherman, you could always go back. He fished there for anybody who could catch them, right? He could always go back and be a fisherman. But once you walked away from your tax franchise, believe me, the vultures sitting on the brink waiting to take over, would take over and there wouldn't be anything to go back to.

So when Luke adds, "He forsook all," he means that. There was no return. This is dramatic. Without an explanation, the man abandons everything which for him has always been everything. He was a man of the world. He was a man who didn't care about religion, he didn't care about his place in society, he didn't care about friendships, he didn't care about prestige, he didn't care about honor, he didn't care about respect, all he cared about was money. He was as crass, greedy as you can get. He didn't care what God thought, what the Pharisees thought, what the people in his town thought, what the synagogue leaders thought. He didn't care anything about anything but money. He would live any way he wanted to live, he was content with the scum and the riff-raff who circled around the tax collectors.

And by the way, that's all there was in that company because they were all outcasts. Fishermen, they didn't have any stigma and the fish didn't care. But tax collector, that's different. This is a scandalous, scandalous act on the part of Jesus that shows His total disregard for religious, societal sensibilities. What teacher who calls himself the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, who is holy and righteous would ever, ever, ever call into His company a tax collector. One historian says, "The Mishnah and the Talmud, though written later, register scathing judgments on the tax collector, lumping the tax collector with thieves and murderers. The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean. Jewish contempt of tax collectors is epitomized in the ruling that Jews could lie to tax collectors with impunity.

Now, this is the kind of man he is. Now let's dig a little deeper into the kind of man he is. He's sitting in the tax booth, what does that tell us? Well, there were sort of a complex system of taxes, like there is today...many, many, many kinds of taxes. But the bottom line was, Rome established maybe along with Herod Antipas a certain amount of money that would have to come to them. Whatever you get beyond that, you can have. So literally it was a license for t he Galilee mafioso. That's what it was, it was a Galilee mafia made up of tax collectors. It involved crime, larceny, arbitrariness, extortion, usury, exploitation. It was the worst. They were barred from synagogues, all tax collectors, and all the people who worked with them. They were unclean. They couldn't testify in a court of law. They were lumped with murderers and robbers, only they were thought to be worse because of their treason.

There were two kinds of tax collectors. There were two kinds of tax. There was general tax, that would come down to land tax, property tax, income tax, state tax, those kinds of things we're familiar with, general tax.

But then there were other taxes. These would be duties. We're familiar with that, too, right? We pay an estate tax when we die. We pay an income tax every year. We pay property tax, those are fixed general taxes. The people who collected those in first century Judaism were called gabbai, g-a-b-b-a-i, it's a fitting name, gabbai because that's where their money went. I don't know if they intended

that, but that's the way it worked out.

So anyway, they said gabbai to the gabbai who took their money on a regular basis. But then you had another kind of tax collector who was called a mokhes, —o-k-h-e-s would be a way to transliterate that Greek word, mokhes...mokhes. They put a tax on everything...tax on import, tax on export, tax on transport. They put tolls on roads, bridges, harbor tolls. They put tolls on the number of wheels, how many legs your donkey had, animals, packages, letters, kind of like today, right? Tax everything.

Well it's nothing new, folks, nothing new. They were the worst because they weren't fixed taxes, they were flexible taxes and the criminal element found its way into the mokhes group and there was such a thing as a great mokhes, he employed all the little mokhes. The Great Mokhes lived in the big house way up on the hill, as far away from the people that he could get. And the little mokhes was down in the booth, reaping the hatred and vitriol and scorn of the people whose money he extorted for the sake of the big guy on the hill.

Well Matthew was a little mokhes, but if you were a good little mokhes in the sense that you were efficient, you could make a lot of money. And if you had the right thugs around you, you could get it out of people, if by pain. Nobody in their right mind would want to be an associate of a little mokhes. Jesus called him to be His disciple. Jesus knew that Levi Matthew had come to recognize his sin, not just the stigma of his job, his career, not just the corruption of his abusive deeds, but his wretchedness before God as a hopeless, condemned violator of God's Law, the man knew he was a sinner, knew there was nothing in himself to commend himself to God. He was hopeless, doomed, damned, and he believed in Jesus and he wanted forgiveness and Jesus knew it. And all Jesus had to say was, "Follow Me." And he got out of that box so fast and left it all behind.

In that moment, everything that controlled his life had no meaning to him. The money had no meaning, the power, the world lost its grip. The old ways lost their charm. Under conviction, all he wanted was forgiveness and he knew Jesus was the one who could provide it. He had a new heart, new mind, new longings, new desires and never looked back.

So, Levi Matthew, the traitor, Levi Matthew, the extortioner, the robber, the outcast, the greedy, abusive sinner became a disciple and an apostle and a writer of the history of Jesus. Lost a career, gained eternal glory. Lost material possessions, gained heaven. Lost earthly security, gained heavenly inheritance. He knew what the Jewish leaders didn't know. He knew that it was for men and women like him that Jesus had come to bring salvation.

Well, the call of Matthew leads to the community of sinners. Let's carry the story forward in verse 15, "And it happened that he was reclining at the table in his house," that's in Matthew's house. "And many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many of

them and they were following them." Matthew now is filled with gratitude. He is thrilled about what the Lord has done in his life and he's going to have a banquet. This is a lavish, long, drawn-out, big-time feast to honor Jesus Christ. He has a big house so even as a little mokhes, you can make a lot of money. Luke 5:29 says it was his house, large house. And they reclined. That's the posture for a long, relaxed meal. We don't know about that. We eat fast, standing up, moving. This was another world, another time.

So they all reclined. Literally on an elbow eating with the other hand, feet away from the table. A lavish feast to honor Jesus and to hear Him and to hear the story of forgiveness and to have Matthew give his testimony to all his friends. And, of course, those were the only people who would come because those are the only people he could associate with because he was an outcast. He invited them all. So what you had here was all the dishonorable, despised rejects of Galilee, everybody in the tax world. And you know what's happening? There's a revival going on here because it says there were tax collectors and sinners, the general category which include all the thugs, and all the side-line professions of crime and prostitution that went with the rest, and they were all there and there were many of them and they were following Him. There's a revival that's breaking up the Galilee mafia. Sinners, hamartolos, the wicked, Mishnah says gamblers, money lenders, I love this one, dove erasers, that's what the Mishnah says. Sabbath violators, violent shepherds...shepherds were considered filthy as well, tax collectors, thieves, thugs, enforcers, drunkards, prostitutes, all the dregs of society, the am ha-aretz, that is the land, people of the dirt, people who would never get to heaven, never could get to heaven and through Jesus they did and the self-righteous did not.

By the way, they were all in there eating with Jesus and His disciples. First use of the word "disciples" in Mark. The disciple is a learner, mathetes is a learner, somebody who is following Jesus to learn from Him.

So there was Jesus along with His disciples, the six would have been there and now we add Matthew to he group and perhaps other followers, and then there are many of these other people who are there. And the common description is, they were all following Him because He was the friend of sinners. They had never known anybody like that, there was nobody in that culture like that. There was no friend for sinners except another wretched sinner who couldn't help.

Well, the call of Matthew in the community of sinners leads, thirdly, to the contempt of the self-righteous...the contempt of the self-righteous. The Pharisees can't let this go, they're always around, always dogging the steps of Jesus. You do remember, of course, that they never leave Him alone, they are absolutely relentless. And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" And again I say, folks, this was the scandal. When the scribes of the Pharisees, it means the scribes who were Pharisees. Scribes were scholars, academicians, lawyers and all sects had them. The Sadducees had them and the other sects had them, the Pharisees had

some too. The scribes who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees were just shocked beyond words, stunned. They couldn't believe it. Eating symbolized acceptance, welcome, even more, friendship. They wouldn't eat with anybody who was a sinner and they would pride themselves on that being because of Psalm 1:1, they would go back and say, "How blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the council of the wicked or stand in the path of sinners...sit in the seat of mockers." They refused to do that. How can Jesus do this? How can this be the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord of heaven, the Savior when He doesn't even come to the standard that we established? This is wholly below the acceptance of the standard of God in their minds.

So Luke says they began grumbling, uses a Greek onomatopoeic word, gongutooo..ooo.(?) And they say, this is a rhetorical question, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" Remember, they had morality without holiness, they could look good but they couldn't be good, they could act righteous but they couldn't be righteous. Their question is intended to be a stinging rebuke, a bitter vindictive, outrageous indictment of Jesus. These are Satan's people and they were facing the distinction between all false religion and the true gospel. The gospel is a conflict between grace and all other religions which are forms of law, faith and all other religions which are forms of works, divine accomplishment and all other religions which are forms of human achievement as a means of salvation. And I remind you that Paul summed it up, He came to justify the ungodly, not the people who earned it...not the people who earned it.

So, true to their religion, they registered their vindictive outrage, He's eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. Sinners is the big category, tax collectors are pulled out of it because of the case of Matthew and because they were the worst.

So the call of Matthew, the community of sinners, the contempt of the religious leaders leads finally to the condemnation of Jesus. Jesus renders a condemnation on them. Verse 17, "Hearing this, they wouldn't have come inside their outside, but these are open houses. Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

His answer to their rhetorical question is two-fold. First, an analogy...first, an analogy, can you understand this? It is not those who are healthy who need a physician but those who are sick. It's a very simple analogy...doctors go to sick people. How simple is that? Jesus is the spiritual doctor, He is the spiritual iatros, physician, healer, and He needs to go to the people who need to be healed. If the Pharisees can see how sick with sin these people are and they already see that, they know they are sinners, they label them as sinners, they have a complete recognition of their sinfulness...doesn't it make sense that if the Savior comes, He goes to the sinners?

This is a very strong indictment of their cold hearts. That's why Jesus said in contrast to going to them, "Come unto Me all you who are heavy ladened and I'll give you rest." In Matthew 23 He said

that they bind strong burdens, heavy burdens on the backs of people, people can't even carry, and they give them no help. Come to Me, if you're a sinner, and I'll forgive your sin. He is the Lord who heals you, as He's identified in Exodus 15:26. He is the soul healer, the spiritual healer. The analogy is obvious, you said they're sinners, you said they're sinners. If they're sinners, if they're sick with sin, they need a spiritual healer, they need a spiritual doctor to forgive their sins.

So His first answer is from an analogy, His second answer is from authority, end of verse 17. "I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." And Luke 5:32 adds, "To repentance." To call, that is to call into the Kingdom, to call to forgiveness, to call to salvation. Jesus said, "I didn't come for you, I can't do anything about you. He accepts on the surface for the sake of the moment their own estimate of themselves. And their own estimate of themselves, these religious leaders, is that they are righteous. Okay, you're righteous, I didn't come for you. And as long as you continue to think you're righteous, you'll die in your sins and where I go, you'll never come. I accept your diagnosis, I accept the delusion. You're the righteous, you don't need Me and I can't offer you anything. I didn't come for the righteous, I didn't come to call the righteous, I can't offer them anything, I came to call sinners to repentance. Oh how they hated Him for this.

They were so far from God, they could identify people as sinners and instead of wanting to be the source of their healing and bringing them spiritual well-being, they had no mercy on them. And when Jesus came and did, they raged with hate at the merciful physician who in compassion welcomed the forgiven and believing sinners into His salvation Kingdom. With Jesus, where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.

So it is today, this church, the church of Jesus Christ is not made up of good people, it's made up of bad people. It's not made up of people who think they're righteous, it's made up of people who know they're not. It's not made up of the people who have attained to a certain acceptable degree with God, it's made up of people who know they could never attain to an acceptable place before God.

It's not made up of people who think they're good, it's made up of people who know they're wicked. It's not made up of people who have achieved righteousness on their own, it's made up of people who have received righteousness from God as a gift. This is the gospel.

Yes, He has the authority to forgive sin, but the only sin He can forgive is the sin of those who know their wretchedness, acknowledge it, put their trust in Him.

Father, we are so blessed, this morning, to hear this glorious message of the gospel again. At the heart of all that we do is this wondrous scandal of grace that where sin abounds, grace does much abound. We thank You that however sinful sin is, grace triumphs. As James 4:6 says, "He gives a greater grace." God is opposed to the proud, His grace to the humble. O Lord, we thank You that You have brought us to the place of being convicted about our sin and our inability to save ourselves

and You've revealed Your glorious gospel of grace to us. I pray for sinners here today who are willing to recognize their sinfulness. May they be like Matthew, just sitting, waiting for the offer, waiting for the call. May that call come to their heart today. May You call them away from sin to the glory of salvation, call them away from guilt to the fullness of forgiveness, not because they earned it but because they asked. Lord, we thank You for this gift, we thank You for our salvation in Christ's name. Amen.

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