

Daily Bible Study

“The Call of Jesus to a Hated Man”

Mark 2:13-17

October 4-10, 2009

THE LORD’S DAY – This week we return to our study in the Gospel of Mark and we will be looking specifically at **Mark 2:13-17**. In this passage we see several things, including, Jesus teaching as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, the call of Levi (Matthew) by Jesus to “*follow Me*” and become one of Christ’s disciples, Jesus’ being invited to Matthew’s home for a banquet which is attended by “*tax collectors and sinners*”, and then Jesus reminding those who were complaining about His behavior exactly what His mission was; namely, “*to call sinners to repentance*” (**Luke 5:32**). Lord willing, we will see in this text the obedience of a genuine follower of Jesus as exemplified by Matthew as well as the care and concern Jesus had for sinners; that care and concern ultimately shown in His gracious call to them to repent and turn from their sin to Him. Jesus teaches us in this passage that He came to save the sinner, the one who sees his sin before God and is broken over it rather than the self righteous person who is not even concerned with his sin before a holy God. Read **Mark 2:13-17**.

The Word Applied: What is one specific thing that stands out to you in reading this text?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, teach me this week as I study and feed upon Your Word.

MONDAY – In **verse 13** we find Jesus is outside walking by the Sea of Galilee, in the fresh air as it were; away from the commotion and bustle of the crowded house and city. But if the scene in your minds eye is one of peace and solitude we read that it quickly is changed as, “*...all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.*” Both the words “*came*” and “*taught*” are in the imperfect tense which speaks of continuous action. The people just kept coming and Jesus kept teaching. We find many scenes such as this in Sacred Scripture pertaining to the life and ministry of Jesus. One such example is in **Mark 6:30-34** where Jesus tells the twelve to “*come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*” as they were apparently so pressed by the people and needed some time and privacy to relax both mind and body. Spiritual ministry can be taxing so much so that this particular text informs us they “*did not even have time to eat*”. Any pastor truly called of God to the “labor” (work) of ministry (**Colossians 1:29, 1 Timothy 5:17**) can relate to this. Incredibly we find Jesus time and again giving up Himself and of Himself for others in order to fulfill His mission of coming to *serve* (**Mark 10:45**). We read in our text that Jesus took this opportunity of the multitude coming to Him to *teach*. A common method of teaching used by the Rabbis of Jesus day would be to teach the people as they traveled from place to place. The people would group themselves around the Rabbi as he walked and they would listen to Him as He taught them. Jesus taught the men on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-32**) in this fashion after His resurrection and this is precisely what we find Him doing here in our text.

The Word Applied: Are you daily coming to Jesus in His Word to be taught by Him? Do you listen to Him and His counsel from Scripture before you make daily decisions? Remember as you walk this road of life that, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me hear and obey as You speak to me from Your Word.

TUESDAY – We read in **verse 14**, that through the course of Jesus’ walking along the Sea of Galilee and teaching the *multitude* He “*saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office.*” Before we look at the call Jesus gives *Levi* let’s look a bit at the man Jesus “*saw*”, *Levi* himself. We know from Scripture that this man *Levi* is one of Christ’s 12 disciples commonly known to us as Matthew. Mark and Luke use the name *Levi* in recording this story but we find that Matthew himself in **Matthew 9:9** uses “*Matthew*” for his name. Both Luke and Mark also call him Matthew when they later speak of him in their gospel records (**Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15**). The question is asked “did his name get changed from *Levi* to *Matthew*”? Did Jesus give him a new name as He did Peter—Simon, Cephas? Among these questions is the possibility that he simply had two names as did other of the disciples as this was not uncommon in that day. Two other examples among the twelve of men being called by multiple names would be: Thaddeus called

Lebbaeus in **Matthew 10:3** and also called Judas (not Iscariot) as in **John 14:22**, and called Judas the son of James as in **Luke 6:16**. Also in **Matthew 10:3** we find Bartholomew who is also known as Nathaniel as in **John 1:45-49**, and **21:2**. Finally on this matter, Luke calls Levi a “*tax collector*” in **Luke 5:27** and then in **Matthew 10:3** we read in the listing of the twelve, “...*Matthew the tax collector*”. For our study we will refer to him as Mark does with the name *Levi*. We know that this man *Levi* was a *tax collector*. Even more than in our day the *tax collector* of *Levi*’s day was not a popular man to say the least. We will comment more on this tomorrow but suffice to say the low esteem that these *tax collectors* or “*publicans*” were held in appears in many portions of Scripture where they are mentioned in the same breath and linked with “*sinners*” by those who disdained them. We even see their great disdain from the religious illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in **Luke 18:9-14**.

The Word Applied: Remember that God knows you and sees you at all times and in all places (home, work, or alone). He even knows your words before you speak them (Psalm 139:4).

Suggestion for Prayer: O Father, help me to be aware of You and Your presence. Govern my thoughts, words, and actions that they would be pleasing and glorifying to You at all times.

WEDNESDAY – As Jesus walks along He *saw* *Levi* sitting at the *tax office*. The word in Greek is Telionion which can be translated as “toll, toll house, customs”, or “the place in which the tax collector sat to collect the taxes”. The word is only used 3 times in Scripture and all in the synoptic gospels as they record this story of the call of *Levi*. Where was this *office* or *toll gate* that *Levi* was working from? We know that Galilee was one of the great road centers of the ancient world and that Palestine served as a giant land bridge between Africa and Europe. From scholars and historians we learn of an extensive road network called among other things, “The Great Road of the Sea”, “Great West Road”, “The Way of the Sea” or as it was called in the Middle Ages the “Via Maris” which ran and extended its branches all through this area. Theologian George Adam Smith in “The Historical Geography of the Holy Land” comments on this road by saying: “The Romans paved it, and took taxes from its traffic; at one of its tolls, in Capernaum, *Matthew sat at the receipt of custom.*” Sitting along this great road *tax collectors* gathered revenue on imports and exports as well as collecting whatever Rome required them to and *Levi* is quit possibly sitting at a toll gate along this great road network. Regardless of where they sat or set up their office, tax collectors usually became wealthy by collecting more than was necessary and pocketing the surplus. Not only were they lining their own pockets but they were filling the coffers of the Emperor of Rome as well. This combination of thieving (extortion) and working for Rome made them a hated group. To understand the hatred for these tax collectors realize that *Levi* was most likely getting rich off his own people and they saw him both as a thief and also as a traitor to his own nation. This is the hated man to whom Jesus said “*Follow Me*”. Another *tax collector* who was miraculously saved is Zacchaeus. He wasn’t just a *tax collector* but a *chief tax collector*. Read of His meeting with Jesus and conversion in **Luke 19:1-10**.

The Word Applied: Is your attitude that of Zacchaeus, who desired to make restitution to those he had wronged? Do you prove by your actions and attitudes that you have been born again?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, create in me a desire to love others. Help me to live in a way that sees others welfare above my own. Forgive me for my selfishness.

THURSDAY – In **verse 14** Jesus said to *Levi*, “*Follow Me*”, and the next phrase says, “*So he arose and followed Him*”. We find no delay or indecisiveness on the part of *Levi* but rather a decisive and immediate obedience. More than just noticing his response to Christ we must look to Luke’s account of this event for a HUGE detail that emphasizes the greatness of sacrifice on the part of *Levi*. Whether or not the money *Levi* was making was honest and just or not he was in a lucrative and secure job as a *tax collector*. Luke informs us in **Luke 5:28**, “...*he left all, rose up and followed Him*”. He “*left*” *kataleipo* (to leave down or behind, to abandon) “*all*” *hapas* (absolutely all, everything, everyone). The Greek can be no clearer: He left behind absolutely everything. We know some of the other disciples were fishermen and we even find that in their despair they went back and did a little fishing after Jesus death (**John 21:3**). At this stage of their calling by Jesus they could have went back and resumed fishing for a living but not *Levi*. He totally walked away and in a job that was filled with thieves not doubt another thief eagerly filled the void and

began to cash in. We know from Scripture this *Levi* went from being an abhorred tax collector to an obedient disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, we see He was a man who possessed great talent being acquainted with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He shows great knowledge of the Old Testament Scripture which he quotes often in his gospel record. And as **verse 15** will bear out he was a humble and hospitable man of God. Read from Levi's own record in **Matthew 16:24-26** of the high cost and infinite value in following Jesus.

The Word Applied: Have you left all to follow Jesus? What is it that you desire most in life? Ask yourself if you love what you want more than you love what you need?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, cultivate in me the desire to know & love You above everything.

FRIDAY – In **verse 15** we find Mark picturing Jesus as a guest in Levi's home. We read that “*He was dining in Levi's house*”. Some translations read that “*he reclined at table*” which is a better literal rendering of the Greek which in fact means to “lay down, to lie prostrate, to recline, of those at meals”. This was a posture for eating in Jesus day when you had guests. Luke again provides details as he tells us *Levi* made Him (Jesus) a “*great (mega) feast*” (**Luke 5:29**) and that there were “*a great number of tax collectors*” present. *Levi* shows his genuine love for Jesus as well as his desire for his friends to know Christ as he invites all of his former co-workers if you will to this great banquet in his home. We also read that many “*sinners*” were at this meal with Jesus as well. The word in its basic definition means “devoted to sin, pre-eminently sinful, a sinner”, but it is also a derogatory term used by the Pharisees for anyone that would not conform to their standard of righteousness (their interpretation of God's law). Jesus Himself and His disciples were in some sense “*sinners*” according to the Pharisees interpretation. Two examples would be that they ate without ceremonially washing their hands, and violated the Pharisees twisted view of the Sabbath. These self righteous religious leaders demonstrated their lost condition with the attitudes expressed in **Luke 18:9** and **John 7:47-49**.

The Word Applied: According to these verses, what was it that these self righteous people trusted in rather than Jesus, and what was their attitude toward those who weren't like them?

Suggestion for Prayer: Jesus, help me not be a self righteous hypocrite & always hate MY sin.

SATURDAY – **Verses 15-16** tell us Jesus heard the comments of the *scribes*. It's important to understand Jesus DID NOT condone the sin of the “*sinners*”. As a matter of fact He saw them as “*sick*” people who needed a “*physician*”. And Jesus was never defiled or stained by their sin as He was “*separate from sinners*” (**Hebrews 7:26**). He called them to repent of their sin and turn to Him. Only the man who recognizes his sin can be saved. Read **Isaiah 55:1, 6-7**.

The Word Applied: Are you daily forsaking your wicked ways and returning to The Lord?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, thanks for Your mercy and pardon given to the repentant man.