

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**MARK 2:13** And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

**14** And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

**15** And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples:

for there were many, and they followed him.

**16** And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

**17** When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

## NOTES



# Calling Sinners to Repentance

Lesson Text: Mark 2:13-17

Related Scriptures: Matthew 9:9-13; John 1:35-51; I Corinthians 6:9-11

TIME: A.D. 28

PLACE: Capernaum

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

One of Mark's emphases is the compassion of Jesus that compelled Him to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of those around Him. As He moved through the early days of His public ministry, He carefully chose a group of men to learn from Him and eventually to become spiritual leaders in the church. Among them were some that most of us would never have picked as good candidates for such ministry.

### **CALLING A DISCIPLE— Mark 2:13-15**

**Teaching (Mark 2:13).** Jesus' fame was spreading all over Galilee (1:28). After being gone from Capernaum for a time, He returned to this place that He had made His ministry headquarters (2:1). As soon as the word spread that He was there, a quartet of men searched Him out, carrying a paralyzed man. Because of the crowds, the only way they could reach Him was to lower the man from a hole in the roof above Jesus. Upon seeing the paralyzed man and the faith of his friends, Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven (vs. 5).

He then sent him on his way, healed and carrying his bed (vss. 11-12).

There was a mixed reaction to the incident. Most of the people were amazed and glorified God because of what they had witnessed. The scribes, on the other hand, considered Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness blasphemous (vss. 6-7). Although they did not verbalize their thoughts, Jesus knew them and confronted them (vss. 8-10). This is the first such confrontation with the religious leaders recorded in Mark.

The second incident of opposition is recorded in this week's text. As soon as Jesus had told the man to take up his bed and go home, Jesus left the house. It appears that most of Jesus' ministry was out in the open, where He could reach more people with His message.

As Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, it did not take long for another crowd to gather around Him. He immediately began to teach them.

**Calling (Mark 2:14).** As Jesus was walking along, He passed by a "receipt of custom," that is, a tax collector's



booth. A man by the name of Levi was operating it. All three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record this incident. Both Mark and Luke refer to the man as Levi, but Matthew refers to him as Matthew. He was, in fact, the same Matthew who wrote the Gospel. In Matthew 10:3, where he listed the twelve disciples Jesus had chosen, he referred to himself as "Matthew the publican," which is the same as "Matthew the tax collector."

This was probably a sincere demonstration of his humility, for in referring to himself as a tax collector, Matthew admitted that he was once a man hated by his own people. The implication is that God had been gracious to him in allowing him to be a disciple of Jesus in spite of his past record.

"Tax collectors were some of the most hated people in Israel. In order to be a tax collector, a person had to purchase the rights for this business from Rome. . . . He could then charge whatever tax he wanted in order to recoup the money he paid to Rome. . . . Tax collectors were considered traitors and extortioners. They were not allowed to be witnesses or judges in court because they were considered untrustworthy. They were excommunicated from the synagogue" (Cooper, *Mark*, Broadman).

When Jesus issued the invitation to Levi to follow Him, he immediately arose from his booth and followed. Luke says, "And he left all, rose up, and followed him" (5:28).

Jesus called to be a disciple a man who was banned from all religious fellowship and whose money was considered tainted and defiled. Even though he was hated by people, Levi was loved by God. When given the opportunity to serve Him, he responded.

**Associating (Mark 2:15).** According to Luke 5:29, Levi followed his call by hosting a feast in his house in honor

of Jesus. Just as any of us would do, he invited the people he knew best. This resulted in a good number of tax collectors and sinners, for that was the realm in which Levi had always lived.

Jesus apparently saw this as an opportunity to reach into their lives with the truth. Because of Matthew's financial means, he was able to host "a great feast." We have no idea how many were in attendance, but we do know there were many present who needed to hear the message Jesus was preaching. In order to reach them, Jesus knew He had to associate with them without making them think He felt superior to them.

We must remember that among the many who were following Jesus at this time were some He could never have reached in the synagogues; they had been banned from there. Mark specifically mentioned that Jesus' disciples were present, as were many others who followed Him.

#### **DEFENDING A LIFESTYLE— Mark 2:16-17**

**Criticized (Mark 2:16).** We noted earlier that this is the second recorded occasion on which Jesus received opposition and criticism from the religious leaders. Once again the scribes caused the problem. These were some of the teachers who prided themselves on being the most learned interpreters of what God had said to mankind through the Mosaic Law.

"These Pharisees, with their young theological students, had come for the purpose of criticism, and the occasion was not long lacking. As they stood beside the wall of the long banquet hall, these . . . hypocrites affected to be horrified that Jesus and His disciples should be eating with publicans and sinners—the pariahs of society!" (Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, Eerdmans).

It was Jesus' disciples who were



addressed by the scribes, not Jesus Himself. It appears they did not want to risk addressing Jesus directly. To understand their fear, we need to recall their previous encounter with Him. When the paralyzed man had been let down in front of Him, they had thought in their hearts that He was speaking blasphemies against God in telling the man his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:7). Jesus immediately asked them why they were thinking these things.

Jesus then asked, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (vs. 9). Jesus meant it was easy to tell someone his sins were forgiven without there being any proof. It was impossible, however, to tell a paralyzed person to get up and walk without the proof of the power to heal being immediately obvious. Upon telling the man to get up and walk, Jesus proved that He also had the authority to forgive his sins.

This incident left the scribes with nothing further to say. They had been exposed in front of all the people and had no way to refute Jesus and redeem themselves! It is not surprising that they sought to avoid another direct confrontation with Him. Therefore, it was to His disciples that they accusingly posed the question (vs. 16). It was an underhanded method of criticism.

**Responding (Mark 2:17).** The scribes apparently had not learned their lesson from the previous encounter. If Jesus could read their thoughts, He certainly could hear what they were muttering to His disciples.

By "sinners," the Pharisees were possibly referring to anyone who did not live by the rigid standards they had set. They had separated themselves from all they considered sinners, and they had a very superior attitude.

Jesus explained His presence by stating that people who are not sick do

not need a doctor; those who are sick do. In the same way, He did not come to call righteous people to repentance; rather, He came to reach sinners. He was associating with those who needed Him the most. What He had to offer was salvation from their sins.

There is a hint in Jesus' response that He knew the scribes considered themselves to be righteous already and thus not in need of anything from Him. Being self-righteous, they could not recognize their own need for repentance.

Matthew instantly recognized his need. His immediate response and subsequent ministry show us how God can use those who obey Him.

—Keith E. Eggert

## QUESTIONS

1. In Mark's Gospel, what caused the first recorded criticism of Jesus by the scribes in Galilee, and what did Jesus do next?
2. What took place as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee?
3. Who was Levi, and why did his occupation make him an unlikely candidate for being a disciple?
4. What was Levi's response to Jesus?
5. Where did Jesus go soon after He called Levi, and who else went?
6. Why were the scribes so critical about the people Jesus was with?
7. How did the scribes voice their criticism this time?
8. What did the scribes and Pharisees possibly mean by their use of the term "sinners"?
9. What response did Jesus give to the scribes' criticism?
10. How did His response reflect on those who felt superior to others?

—Keith E. Eggert



## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus calls whomever He desires, no matter what others may think or do (Mark 2:13-14a).
2. The best obedience is immediate obedience (vs. 14).
3. Like Jesus, we should be willing to befriend anyone in order to share the good news with that person (vs. 15).
4. Bible knowledge should lead one to compassion and empathy rather than a judgmental spirit and arrogance (vs. 16).
5. It is a good thing that Jesus came to save the spiritually sick, for all people (whether they know it or not) are spiritually sick (vs. 17).

—Don Kakavecos

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do you think the people Jesus was teaching felt about His call of Levi, the tax collector? What kinds of people today would be thought of in a similar manner to the tax collectors of Jesus' day?
2. What does Jesus' choice of Levi suggest to you about the makeup of His band of disciples? Did such choices hurt or help His mission?
3. What attitude did Jesus portray by eating with the tax collectors and sinners?
4. Why do you think the scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus' disciples rather than Jesus Himself?
5. Was Jesus saying the scribes and Pharisees were spiritually healthy? Why is it crucial to get unbelievers to see themselves as sinners?

—Don Kakavecos

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17).**

The love of the Father is seen in the calling of sinners to repentance and the works of Jesus. He gives grace to the humble but resists the proud (Jas. 4:6). Jesus' acts of love, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, fellowshiping with sinners, and proclaiming forgiveness, were usually done in the midst of opposition from the self-righteous.

The scribes and Pharisees were the most consistent opponents of Jesus. Many unbelieving Jewish leaders maintained carefully crafted outward practices while remaining inwardly unchanged. They said they believed in love but did not express it toward sinners. The law was intended to point to the grace and truth that would come through Jesus Christ, but the remedy, Jesus Himself, became a stumbling block for most of the scribes and Pharisees and much of Israel (Rom. 9:30-33).

Our own forgiveness of others is motivated by God's forgiveness of us in Christ (Eph. 4:32). Forgiveness can be open-ended when the offender has not asked for forgiveness, but it is always best when the offender acknowledges his or her sin, resulting in repentance to God. In such cases, we should wholeheartedly forgive those who have wronged us and repented to us and God.

—Brian Burke