

Mark 2:13-17 The Personal Relationship with Jesus

Today we are in Mark chapter 2 verses 13 through 17, as we continue in this first major section in Mark's gospel where Mark is presenting Jesus and His ministry in Galilee. This will go all the way through to the end of chapter 9. Last week we saw the curing of the paralytic. *Paralytic* just means *paralyzed one*. And today we are taking the calling of Levi, verses 13 through 17. Levi is another name for Matthew. Matthew wrote Matthew's Gospel. Levi is also one of his Jewish names as we will see in a moment. So the calling of Levi, or the calling of Matthew is what we are going to study this morning.

But just by way of introduction I want to let you be aware of something that is very important in the study of the Bible, as well as understanding Christian fellowship in our day. In the Lord's ministry there were two kinds of ministry that He performed. One was public ministry, where He ministered to the general public. And the second ministry that He had was private ministry. He taught differently in private with individuals than He did in public. His public ministry He manifested Himself. He performed miracles and revealed Himself through these miracles as to who He is to the people. When you follow Him personally you have to give up yourself. It is different than following along and participating in all the excitement and all the things going on that Jesus is doing publicly. You have to give up yourself in private. You have to deny yourself. You have to take up your cross and you have to follow Him. But you do not hear what Jesus has to say about it, what it is supposed to be like to have a personal relationship with Him.

I can always go and experience happy times with the crowds in the public ministry. But in my private life and in my private walk with the Lord, it is a personal relationship, and it is not always happy times. You get a different sensation from each type of fellowship. And He deals with us in different ways. That is why some people would like to stay with large churches to experience the public ministry of Jesus in general as the Lord manifests Himself and as people experience Him. But it is different in private. It is different with small groups.

You will hear ministers today - I remember when we were with Calvary Chapel many years ago. Chuck Smith would always say that you need to be here for about five years and after that you need to find a smaller group, somebody that you can be accountable to, someone that you can grow with. You cannot do that in a large church. In fact, some people would prefer to be in a large church and not have to go through the pains of growing, and the conviction, and the dealing that Jesus does with us on a personal basis.

But we notice that as we go through the Gospels. We notice the public ministry of Jesus is different than the private ministry of Jesus where He gets personal. In the scene that we saw last week with the paralytic, or the paralyzed man, they let them down in front of Jesus and Jesus told him, "Your sins have been forgiven." To a paralyzed man. But he is paralyzed. Jesus did not heal him, He just said, "Your sins have been forgiven." So the religious leaders began to complain. They said, "That is blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins." The healing of the paralytic and the forgiving of the paralytic is a perfect example of the Lord's public ministry.

The same [concept] that I have been sharing with you over the years. His healing was not just to heal people but to manifest, or reveal, His authority so that people could see; nonbelievers can see a physical revelation of who Christ is. In other words, what Jesus did physically in the human was reveal Himself and what His spiritual ministry is. He did not promise miracles for everybody all the time. He did it to reveal Himself and to manifest Himself.

He later, to the leaders who were sitting there and they said, "He commits blasphemy because He has forgiven this man his sins and only God can forgive sins." That is right. And Jesus says, "Which is easier to say, 'your sins have been forgiven,' or, 'take up your bed, rise up, and walk,' to the paralyzed man?" Well, it is easier to say, "your sins have been forgiven," because that is invisible. You do not know if that is really true or not. It is harder to say, "take up your bed, rise up, and walk," to a paralyzed man. It has to work for your words to have authority.

So Jesus told the paralytic, this paralyzed man, to rise and take up your bed and walk. He says, "Just to show you that the Son of Man has authority upon the earth to forgive sins." Interesting. The healing was a physical manifestation of the authority of Christ to forgive people their sins. So the physical healing, the purpose for physical healing as we revealed to you last week from the first part of this chapter was so that the Lord can manifest and reveal His spiritual ministry. He did not promise, there are no promises in the Bible that God wants His people healed all the time. There are no promises. He does not promise that.

And as I shared with you last week, once you are healed - Jesus can heal, and once He does heal, you are still not healed because you are still dying. You are in the aging process. You are never fully totally healed. All of the people that Jesus healed eventually died. All the people that he raised from the dead eventually died again, they are not with us, they eventually experienced it. Why? Because it was temporary, a temporary manifestation and revelation of Christ and who He is.

In verses 13 and 14 for today, it says, **And He went out again along the sea; and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. And while passing by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and Jesus says to him, "Follow Me." And having risen up, he followed Him.** Right away. No questions asked. Notice his name is Levi. He is sitting at the tax collection booth. This is the same as Matthew, the same person. Matthew calls himself *Matthew* in the Gospel of Matthew. Mark and Luke call him *Levi*, his other Jewish name. He is called *Levi* because he was of the Levites. Matthew is a Jewish name that means gift of Yah, which is short for Yahweh. Matthew is called Levi the son of Alphaeus. So he has two Jewish names. A lot of Jewish men had two names. He is Matthew the Levite. So he is either called Matthew or he is called Levi, but he calls himself Matthew in his gospel and as I mentioned to you before, Mark and Luke use the name Levi, but he is the same person.

So in verse 14 it tells us that Levi was sitting at the tax collection booth. *The receipt of custom* is a tax collection booth, emphasize on the word *booth*. It is סֻכָּה (sukkāh) in Hebrew, is the *booth* or the *tent* there for the collection of taxes.

The taxes were taken by the Roman government against the Jewish people, and they were taxed heavily. And what the Roman government would do for these various geographical areas is that they put the tax collection service up for bid. And the highest bidder would become the tax collector. And the tax collector would collect the taxes for the Roman government, plus for his own services. So he can tag on whatever money he wanted with their taxes. So tax collectors became very rich.

The problem is when a Jewish person himself decides that he wants to be a tax collector, I want to collect taxes from my own people for Rome, it was considered treason. Imagine a Jewish person wanting to work for Rome against his own people. And he taxed his own people for the Roman government and puts some money on the side for himself. Why would he want to do that? Because tax collectors became very rich.

In fact if a Jewish person became a tax collector he was forbidden to ever go into the synagogue. He was considered to be unclean and not qualified to participate with the Jewish people. He is forbidden to interact with his fellow Jews outside of his job of collecting taxes. But because they became so rich Jewish people succumbed to the temptation. He would rather become rich than identify with his own people.

So that is what Matthew or Levi did. Levi was a tax collector, and he was sitting at the tax collector's booth collecting taxes from his own people whom they hated. They hated him. He was collecting for the government and then of course some money for himself, making himself rich.

There were two good two kinds of tax collectors one kind is called the *gabbai*. The *gabbai* collected property taxes and Temple tax from people. But then we had the *mokkes*. Levi was a *mokkes*. The *mokkes* would set up these booths and as people traveled through they would collect tolls from them for traveling on the road. And they brought in goods and they would tax the goods and take from the people. Levi had his booth. As the fisherman came in, he would tax them for the fish that they caught. The *mokkes*. There were two kinds of *mokkes*. One hired the work out, subcontracted their work to other people. So obviously Levi was a small or little *mokkes*, in that he was sitting at the collection booth doing the work himself. He was not big enough to subcontract it out to other people.

But there is a contention here. There is a real struggle going on with Levi. It does not look like that from the surface, but just from the information that I am giving you it tells you the situation that Levi had to face about himself. I want you to understand this about Levi. He is at a point of no return. See, he is now face-to-face with Jesus. He has already been separated from his own people. He already cannot go back into society. He is considered unclean by the Jewish people and hated by the Jewish people. So he cannot go back and yet, now he is coming face-to-face with Jesus and he is having a tough time with what Jesus is going to tell him to do. He is on a road to become rich and all he cares about is himself. If he ever left the tax collection business he could never go back, once you leave. So when you are face-to-face with Jesus what do you do?

We look at the command in verse 14, **Jesus tells Levi, "Follow Me."** That is all He says. **And after having risen up, Levi followed Him.** He just got up from the tax booth, left all the money, left the whole thing and followed Jesus. Mind you, he cannot go back into society. So if he is following Jesus, if he left the tax collection business and turned his back on Rome - he has already turned his back on his people - he has nowhere to go except follow Jesus, which makes it even harder for him. What now? He does not know what is going to happen to him now. In fact in Luke chapter 5 verse 28 it says that he left everything, meaning he did not go back. He left it all behind. He did not collect the money. He did not collect his things.

In Philippians chapter 3 verse 7 Paul says, **What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.** You know that if you follow Christ you are going to lose opportunity for wealth and for money and for possessions. And Paul says, **Everything I figure to be gain to me I counted them loss for Christ.** He gave them up. He gave up all the opportunities for wealth and to further himself. He counted them loss for Christ.

So what does he do? He follows Jesus and then he holds a dinner party for all of his friends because he wants them to know why he left the tax business and who Jesus is. Notice verse 15, **And it happened while He reclined in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.** The word *reclining* tells us that when they ate, they would lay out on cushions with their head towards the table and their feet to the back, that is how they would eat, laying down. Feet towards the back, head towards the table, usually leaning with one arm on the table, and reaching with the other arm for the food.

Now it says that those who were with Jesus were tax collectors and sinners. That is interesting. More specifically in this category of sinners is *kevurah*. A *kevurah* is the Hebrew word that means *somebody who has abandoned the Mosaic law* and has rejected God's covenant with Israel. This would be a Jewish person, rejecting. Not going to temple, rejecting all that God has to say. Rejecting His covenant and His covenant promises. So a sinner to a Jew is somebody who does not go to synagogue, they have rejected the law, they have rejected the God of Israel, and they have decided to live their own life as a Jew in their sin. And they are put in the category of tax collectors, because that is who tax collectors are. They have given up everything to become rich and work for Rome. Well, the Jew also considered sinners, not [to be] tax collectors, but in the same category. That they have rejected the covenant of God for Israel, and they have rejected the synagogue practice.

Look at verse 16, **And after the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with tax collectors and sinners, they were saying to His disciples, "Why is it that He is eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners?"** So, when the Pharisees saw this. A *Pharisee* is a sect, a group amongst the Jews. The word *Pharisee* means *separatist*. They are law keepers. They separate themselves from the people based on the keeping of the law. So the religious leaders go to Jesus's disciples, which is interesting. They did not go to Jesus, they went to Jesus's disciples.

In Matthew chapter 11 verse 19 and Luke chapter 7 verse 34 they call Jesus a glutton and a drunkard because He was eating with them. That is what they said, "Look at Jesus! He is

sitting there while other people are eating and drinking wine. He is sitting with them. He is a glutton and He is a drunkard." So identification with these people.

Now, it is interesting that when Jesus sat with the people, He did not sin with the people. There is a difference between sitting with nonbelievers and sinning with nonbelievers. But Jesus, His identification was with sinners so that is what the people called Him.

You also have to understand, secondly, how important this is about eating with people. The Jews believed religiously that if you ate a meal with another person, you are sharing your life with him and his life with you. You are becoming one. It is the closest social event of becoming one with another person, eating a meal. That is why God gave them, the Jewish people, dietary laws so that they would not eat with the people of the land. They could not eat their food because God says, "You are prevented from eating [those foods], so you cannot eat with them, you cannot become one with them."

That is why Paul said in I Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11 concerning those that are involved in sin, he says, "Stay away from them. In fact, do not even eat with them because when you eat with them you are participating in their lifestyle." That is Paul in I Corinthians chapter 5 in verse 11.

So then, verse 17, **And after having heard, Jesus says to them.** Interesting, they said these things to the disciples, but when Jesus heard them tell the disciples, Jesus is the one that answered up. **"The ones being strong,"** it is a Greek word **ἰσχυρός** (ischuros), which has to do with *healthy, strong, fit*. **"The ones being strong do not have need of a physician, but the ones having sickness. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners unto repentance."** So, I like this. When Jesus heard it, the disciples did not answer but Jesus did when He heard what the leaders had said in the group. So He is putting the Pharisees in the category of thinking that they are healthy. **The ones who are strong do not need a physician.** So, they did not see their need for Jesus because they saw themselves as religiously healthy, and strong, and had no need of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. He says, **"For I did not come to call righteous people, but I came to call sinners to repentance."** The righteous leaders did not consider themselves as sinners so they saw no need of Jesus. But Jesus came to call sinners.

Three things I want to mention quickly in closing for today. I want to point out that there are very important things this morning having to do with these texts, last week and then this week. Three things: (1) position; (2) confession; and (3) direction.

Back in verse 14 Jesus said to Levi, **Follow Me.** We saw back in chapter 1, it talked about the fact that when Jesus called people to Himself, He called people to become disciples, to come after Him, to follow behind Him. See, there is a difference between individual one-on-one with Jesus and becoming a disciple of Jesus and participating in the public ministry of Jesus where He is performing miracles and manifesting Himself. Once you see Him perform the miracles and you receive Him for who He says He is, the Son of God, then you live by faith, you follow by faith. But you come behind Him. He did not call them to become church members. He did not call them even to become Christians. He called them to become His disciples.

Notice secondly, I want to talk about confession. In verse 17 Jesus said, **The ones being strong do not have need of a physician, but the ones who have sickness.** They are the ones who have need of a physician. First of all, you have to be convinced that you are sick to come to Jesus. You have to be ready to acknowledge that you are one of the sick ones in order to come to Jesus. Do you realize that every single person is sick with the disease of sin? It is a spiritual disease and every person is infected by this disease.

Paul says in Romans chapter 3 verse 23, **All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.** Everybody is sick with sin.

So we are told in I John chapter 1 verses 8 through 10, **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** See we come to the Great Physician, we confess our sins, the Lord cleanses us. Verse 10 of first John chapter 1, **Now if we say that we have not sinned,** that is in the past, **we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.** So he says we make God a liar because God says, "Yes, you are. You are a sinner. You are infected by the disease of sin. You are a sinner."

The third thing is direction. It says in verse 17, **I did not come to call the righteous ones, but I have come to call sinners unto repentance.** I do not hear that much anymore, as I said to you before about repentance, calling people to repent. The word *repentance* is the Greek word **μετανοέω** (metanoēō) and it means *to make a decision for change*. But also carries with it that you do not have the ability to make the change. You can only make the decision to come to God and say, "I have need of change in the direction of my life." It means to change the whole direction, and I make that decision. And I am finding that the gospel message today according to our culture says, "Receive Jesus. Take Jesus with you back into your own pagan lifestyle and live any way you want to." We make it easy believeism just to get people into heaven. The message of the gospel was repentance from the beginning.

In Luke chapter 24 verses 46 and 47 Jesus said to the people, **"This way it has been written, that this was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be preached in His name unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** Repentance, and forgiveness of sins, and calling upon the Lord to change the direction of our life.

In II Peter chapter 3 verse 9 it says, **The Lord does not delay His promise, as some people count delay, but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all to come to repentance.** That is why the Lord has not brought judgment right now. That is why we are still here is because the Lord is long-suffering, that is, slow in reaction. He does not want people to die in their sins. He is giving everybody a chance to repent. God wants everybody to come to repentance.

In Luke chapter 3 verse 8 John the Baptizer is recorded as telling the Jews coming out to be baptized, **Therefore produce fruits worthy of repentance.** Not just lip service, because at salvation you receive the Spirit of Christ into your spirit. You are surrendering yourself. You are saying, "I am no longer being the lord of my own life." His Spirit comes in and His Spirit takes

us down His road. That is His direction. When I say, "Lord, I am making a decision to change the direction of my life," it is receiving His Spirit that makes the change. Did you hear that? It is the receiving of His Spirit that makes the change in the direction of someone's life. That is different than public ministry, where we can go and participate with the large crowds, and all the emotional stimulation, and all the excitement. On an individual basis a person must repent of their sins. That is, repent of the direction of their life: of being their own lord and doing their own thing, and surrendering to Christ by receiving His Spirit. And His Spirit takes over, when He does that He is now the Lord.

And as I said before, some people preaching the gospel in our culture say, "You receive Christ, then you take Him with you." But the gospel of the Bible is that you receive Christ and He takes you with Him. There is a difference. The direction of life changes. You see, my sin nature is displayed and revealed by me going my own way.

Isaiah chapter 53 verse 6 says, **All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.** We have gone astray. We have all gone our own way. That is what sin is. Sin is not necessarily doing bad things. It is just going our own way. So the Lord says, "You have to repent." That is the message of the gospel. You do not hear that in public ministry where you have got large crowds. Very rarely do you hear anybody even mention repentance, let alone explain its detailed meaning that you must receive Christ and change the direction of your life. It might mean you do not go to the big church meetings and public ministries anymore. You take up your cross and you follow Christ on a personal basis.

God calls for repentance, not people to become Christians, or be religious, or even people to just believe. He calls for repentance, make a decision for change in the direction of your life and receive Christ. We do not take the Lord with us, we follow Him. We follow behind Him. I follow what He is doing and how He leads. I do not lead Him, He leads me. And it is all based on my confession: my confession of my sins that has made Him the Lord of my life. And my sins made me the lord of my own life. But now He is made Master, and He has His own plan about life and how it is going to work out. But repentance and following Jesus - not looking for Him to give me human directions as to what He wants me to do in my human effort with my human resources, but rather looking for His lead.

So we see our position. When Jesus called people to follow Him, He called them to follow behind Him, follow after Him. And He called people personally to, in their own hearts and minds and in their own life, leave everything. He did not necessarily make that a condition for every single person but when He calls us we come. And we follow behind Him. We do not follow the crowds, we follow Him personally. It is based on confession. If we confess our sins He is just, and He is able, and He is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And this confession is to call upon the Lord to change the direction of our life. Instead of me leading my own life, which is what the Bible calls sin; instead of me following the direction of my own life, I confess my sins and lay down my life to follow Jesus and His plan and His will for me.

It is totally different than following the crowds, following the big movements, and experiencing an experience with the crowds. On a personal basis it is very private and it is very difficult on a human level. It is not about experiencing things with people, it is all about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And following Him, confessing Him, confessing our sins, and confessing Him as our Lord, and repenting of the way in which we are going. And call upon Him for a new direction in life by receiving His Spirit and letting His Spirit lead. That is personal. That is private. That is what He calls everybody to do. But only a few, Jesus said, only a few find it.

Let's close with prayer.