

Saving Sinners

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[0 : 00] Jesus and the Scribes And all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, Follow me. And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

And the Scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Here's the main idea. Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and underscores his purpose by calling the outcast of society.

Once again, Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and underscores his purpose by calling the outcast of society. Here's how John MacArthur summarized what we saw last week and what we will see tonight.

[1 : 41] He said, In Mark 2, verses 1-12, Mark recounted the story of the paralyzed man who was healed by Jesus in a house in Capernaum. That healing miracle validated the authority of Jesus to forgive sinners.

This section in verses 13-17 reveals the people to whom Jesus extends that forgiveness, namely repentant sinners. The dramatic incident recorded in these verses illustrates the fact that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's grace.

Jesus was willing to save even the lowest of the low, a hated tax collector, and his friends. Before we dig into the verses, here's something for each of us to ask ourselves as we go through the passage.

In this text, we see Jesus, the friend of sinners, as he reaches out to the seemingly unlikely, the socially undesirable, and the spiritually unhealthy. Look carefully at all the characters in the story and ask, With whom do I most identify, the scribes or the sinners?

Am I loving and serving sinners as Jesus did? Said another way, ask yourself this question. When I see blatant sinners, am I more like the scribes and Pharisees, or am I more like Jesus?

[2 : 59] People who imagine themselves to be too good to need salvation judge themselves and others on a scale of relative values. They put sin in various categories and grade it according to differing degrees.

To them, the prodigal son's sins would be much more wicked than the sins of his older brother. On their scale, a harlot would be much worse than a hypocrite, and a murderer much worse than a gossip.

But God has a different scale, and that's his own absolute goodness. That leaves everyone in the same category. We are all lost sinners in need of a Savior.

In Mark chapter 1, verses 16 through 20, we saw Jesus call his first disciples. Remember, those disciples were Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Jesus is about to add one more to his group, and that next disciple is someone whom the people of that day would have least expected. We'll break tonight's passage into three sections, starting with verses 13 and 14.

[4 : 04] And in verses 13 and 14, we see the call. So the call is your first blink. Listen to Mark 2, verses 13 and 14 again.

Speaking about Jesus, the verses say, He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, Follow me.

And he rose and followed him. Jesus is still drawing crowds as he goes around the Capernaum area. The crowd almost certainly wanted to see more miracles like Jesus did during his first day in Capernaum, and like he did by healing the paralyzed man.

As we saw last week, and as we've seen in the Gospel of Mark so far, Jesus focused on what the crowd needed instead of what the crowd wanted. Jesus emphasized teaching, and we see that from verse 13.

Jesus here is again doing what he loved doing, and that's teaching the Word and calling disciples to follow him. He left the small house for a large open area where the crowds could get close to him and hear him.

[5 : 18] And the crowd kept coming to him, and he kept on teaching. Jesus is out among the people with those who need his touch and his teaching, and so there's a simple principle for us to see here, and that is to reach the lost, you have to be with the lost, and you must share the Gospel.

Christ majored on the message, not the miracles. People needed to be taught spiritual truths just as they do in every age. People everywhere are woefully ignorant of spiritual truths and need to be taught.

That may be even more true today than it was back then. Verse 14 would have shocked the crowd, including Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

In fact, the Jews would have considered what happened in verse 14 to be scandals. Listen to verse 14 again. It says, Just like when Jesus called his first four disciples, the word choice here is a subtle claim to deity.

Notice how he said to him, Follow me. All of the prophets said, Follow God, but Jesus said, Follow me. Think about the disciples that we've seen so far.

[6 : 42] Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen. They would have been surprising choices for disciples, but not scandalous ones. But a tax collector to the Jews was a traitor.

Tax collectors were working for the oppressors of their own people. Jewish literature lumps tax collectors with thieves and murderers. They were disqualified as witnesses in court.

They were expelled from the synagogue. And they were seen as a disgrace to their family. In fact, they were so hated and despised that all the rabbis agreed that it was morally okay for a Jew to lie to a tax collector.

For Jesus to call a tax collector to follow him was an unconscionable act of social impropriety, especially in the eyes of the religious elite. Consider something just to make sure it sinks in.

Tax collectors were so hated that the religious elite, including the self-righteous religious elite that we will see tonight, condoned lying to the tax collectors. Because of their hatred for tax collectors, the religious elite condoned intentionally breaking one of the Ten Commandments during dealings with the tax collectors.

[7 : 58] So let's spend some time looking at why the tax collectors were so hated. During the Roman occupation of Israel, the Jewish people were required to pay taxes to Rome.

In Galilee, the responsibility to collect those taxes fell to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch, who sold collection franchises to the highest bidder. Those who purchased a franchise were required to meet a minimum quota for Rome.

Anything they collected beyond that quota was theirs to keep. So you can see the problem with that right away. That arrangement made tax collecting a profitable business venture for anyone with high financial aspirations and low ethical standards.

Tax collectors continually looked for ways to squeeze extra tax out of the people, and they were aided in their collection by thugs and lowlifes. Beyond the poll tax, income tax, and land tax, taxes were levied on the transport of goods and produce, the use of roads, the crossing of bridges, and other miscellaneous activities.

Those duties and tariffs were especially prone to corruption. They could be easily inflated and collected under the threat of harm. Those tax collectors were notorious for exploiting people, charging more than was necessary or reasonable, and then for those unable to pay, loaning money at exorbitant interest rates.

[9 : 33] The ESV tells us that in tonight's passage, a particular tax collector was sitting at a tax booth. Booth is a good translation for that Greek word.

Think of the booth like a toll gate. In Oklahoma, we know something about toll gates. When we're driving on a turnpike, we eventually will come to one or more toll gates.

At our modern toll gates, though, we know how much we will have to pay. Back in Jesus' day, the tax collector could charge whatever he wanted, and if he was so inclined, he could even make up a new tax.

Maybe I don't like the fact that Mike has on a green shirt today, so I'm going to tax him for wearing that green shirt as he goes by my toll booth. I'll just take it off. Taxes for taking a toll booth.

The fact that this tax collector was sitting at a tax booth gives us more detail about him and his place in the hierarchy. According to the Talmud, there were two kinds of tax collectors.

[10:38] The Gabay were responsible for collecting the more general taxes like the poll, land, and income tax. More specialized taxes like tolls for using roads and bridges were collected by the Mokis.

A tax booth would be owned by a great Mokis who would employ a little Mokis to sit there and actually collect the taxes. From Mark's description, it's clear that this tax collector was a little Mokis because he was in constant contact with the people.

You know, if you were a higher-up tax collector, you could avoid being seen, but Matthew, or Levi, as he's called here, would be seen every day as they passed by his booth.

So he would have been one of the most well-known and one of the most hated people in Capernaum. One commentator describes his occupation in these words. He said, Levi is no tax baron, but one who is stationed at an intersection of trade routes to collect tolls, tariffs, imposts, and customs for Herod Antipas.

Toll collectors were renowned for dishonesty and extortion. They habitually collected more than they were due, did not always post up the regulations, and made false valuations and accusations.

[11:57] Tax officials were hardly choice candidates for discipleships because most Jews in Jesus' day would dismiss them as those who craved money more than the respectability or righteousness.

Think about it, though, from the world's standpoint. The tax collector had the perfect setup. He could charge what he wanted. He could keep the amount above what was required by Rome. If people couldn't pay, he could make money off interest by acting like a loan shark. And if people could pay but refused to pay, he had his own band of enforcers that he could call to make them pay. To top it all off, everything he did was supported by the Roman government. Let's dig a little bit deeper into the specific tax collector we see in verse 14.

Mark identifies the tax collector as Levi, the son of Alphaeus. The name Levi indicates that the tax collector was Jewish, as most collectors were back then.

[13:03] Because his name was Levi, he may also have been from the tribe of Levi. Remember, that is the tribe which provided the priest and temple assistance. Matthew 9.9 tells us that Levi also was known as Matthew.

So you may hear me use Matthew interchangeably with Levi tonight. We do know that Levi was a Jew who had turned against his own people. That makes him a traitor to the other Israelites.

And if the name Levi was an indication that he was from the tribe of Levi, it would have been even worse in their eyes. A Levite should have been serving God in the temple.

Instead, he was working for the oppressive foreign government. Even if this tax collector was not a part of the tribe of Levi, the names Levi and Matthew tell us that his parents once had high hopes for him.

The name Matthew means gift of God. However, the people of Israel would have considered him to be a direct opposite of a gift from God. We've talked about just how hated the tax collectors were then, but here's a little more detail to underscore that point even more.

[14:16] A Jew who collected taxes was a cause for disgrace to his family. The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean. Jews were forbidden to receive money and even alms from tax collectors since revenue from taxes was deemed robbery.

So again, from a worldly perspective, Levi seemed to have it all. However, his conscience must have been bothering him. We can tell that by his reaction to Jesus' words, follow me.

You see that Mark tells us Levi rose and followed Jesus. Everything that controlled Levi's life up to that point no longer had any meaning.

The money, the power, and the pleasures of the world all lost their grip on his heart. Under conviction, all he wanted was forgiveness and he knew Jesus was the only one who could provide that forgiveness.

He had a new heart, new longings, and new desires. In contrast to the rich young ruler who chose riches over eternal life, Levi abandoned his toll booth and the fortunes that made him to follow the forgiving Son of God.

[15 : 30] Listen to this long but good quote from John MacArthur. He said, in leaving behind his career, Levi understood that there was no going back.

Because his life of sin was connected to his profession, his repentance had significant implications. His livelihood could no longer come through the illicit collection of taxes.

Like Paul, Matthew realized that whatever things were gained to him, those things he counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, he began to count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord.

The former extortionist, traitor, and outcast was transformed into a disciple. Though he lost a career, he gained an eternal reward and an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away reserved in heaven.

He lost material possessions but gained spiritual life. He lost security but gained a heavenly future. He lost financial reward but gained an unfading crown of glory.

[16 : 41] Levi may have been barred from the synagogue but he was accepted by God and granted salvation. This story of Jesus and the tax collectors begins with a very important distinction between the crowd and the disciple.

Notice that the crowd came to Jesus but disciples followed him. Both the crowd and the disciples hear the teaching of Jesus but only disciples follow Jesus.

The crowd comes and goes but a disciple follows Jesus as a permanent way of life. What accounts for that difference? Well, the answer is the call of Christ.

We see that Jesus teaches the crowds but he calls his disciples. Mark doesn't give us any other psychological or situational indicator of why disciples follow Jesus.

Jesus just says, follow me and they do it. Once again, Mark wants us to see that becoming a disciple is a gift of grace and that call is a truth of deep importance.

[17 : 50] Without a divine call, no one can be saved. We're all so sunk in sin and so wedded to the world that we would never turn to God and seek salvation unless God first called us by his grace.

God must speak to our hearts by his spirit before we ever speak to him. When the Lord Jesus calls a sinner to be his servant, he acts as a sovereign, but he acts with infinite mercy.

Jesus often chooses those who seem most unlikely to do his will and those that are furthest off from his kingdom. He draws them to himself with almighty power, breaks the chains of old habits and customs, and makes them into new creatures.

Levi completely forsook his old life to follow Christ, and when you think about it, of all the disciples who later became apostles, Levi probably gave up the most to follow Christ from a worldly perspective.

If necessary, the fishermen among the group could always return to fishing. We even saw them try to return to fishing for a brief time after Jesus' crucifixion.

[19 : 03] Levi, however, could never go back to his old way of life. He would have been replaced as a tax collector as soon as his boss got word that Levi had abandoned his post.

And if Levi later needed another job to support himself, very few, if any, self-respecting Jews would have wanted to hire him. Levi illustrated a very important point.

Listen how Harry Ironside described that point. Loyalty to Christ demands that we surrender our wills to his and seek to glorify him in all our ways.

We often hear it said that our wills must be broken, but that is poor psychology and worse theology. A broken willed man is no longer capable of making definite decisions.

Tennyson wrote, Our wills are ours, make them thine. And this is what scripture emphasizes. We are voluntarily to yield our wills to him who has given himself for us, that our service may be the glad, happy obedience of those who delight in the will of God above all else.

[20 : 13] We need to beware of calling Jesus Lord if we are sliding his commands. It is by obedience that we prove our love for him, as did Levi. Now that we've spent some time learning about Levi, his profession, and his call, let's move to the next section of the lesson.

In verses 15 and 16, we see the criticism. So the criticism is your second point. Here are verses 15 and 16 again.

And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with tax collectors and sinners, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Levi held a large reception for Jesus in his home. We see that many tax collectors and sinners were there. To accommodate such a large gathering, his house must have been large, so this indicates the lucrative nature of his career as a tax collector.

[21 : 31] The celebration centered on a feast at which Jesus was the guest of honor. The Lord was reclining at the table in Levi's house surrounded by Levi's sordid friends who were dining with Jesus and his disciples.

Levi's companions primarily consisted of fellow tax collectors and sinners. That group would have included known criminals, thieves, thugs, enforcers, and prostitutes, all part of the outcast network of which Levi himself had been a part.

From the perspective of the self-righteous religious leaders, these people represented the dregs of society. From Jesus' viewpoint, they comprised the mission field.

These people were sinners and they knew it, the very kinds of people that Jesus had come to seek and to save. Look at the last phrase of verse 15.

Speaking of the tax collectors and sinners, Mark says, for there were many who followed him. the word choice there indicates that like Levi, many of these former outcasts had repented and had chosen to follow Jesus.

[22 : 46] Think about the conversation during that dinner. No doubt the conversation during the early part of the dinner may have been strained. After all, these new followers of Jesus included people who almost certainly had extorted money from Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and now Jesus was asking those four to accept this new game.

Even the original four disciples may have wondered why Jesus decided to pick Levi and his friends. One thing, however, would have united the original four disciples with this new motley crew.

All of them were following Jesus. That common bond through Christ would have overcome any awkwardness. Jesus made the difference.

Both sides were interested in him. He was the common sinner around which they all gathered. They could all talk about him. His disciples could share some of their experiences, and the tax collectors and sinners could express their astonishment and pleasure that Jesus would come so willingly to a gathering convened by one of their own kind.

You almost get the picture of Matthew beaming at the success of his party. That initial awkwardness had been replaced by a celebration.

[24 : 07] And this feast is a celebration of salvation. The party goers are here because they are followers of Christ. These outcasts and outsiders have known rejection, but now they know acceptance in the Messiah.

The mood changes in verse 16. That verse shows us that another group was quite displeased with the gathering. The scribes, as expected, considered the entire situation to be scandalous.

Jason Meyer said, The fact that so many outcasts had gathered in one place reveals something of the scope of this scandal. This would have been too much for any self-respecting scribe to overlook.

It was bad enough to call one tax collector to follow you, but this looked like a moral pandemic.

There were many tax collectors and sinners. They did not have a loose association to Jesus.

They were defined as his followers. The scribes saw a wicked feast. No respectable rabbi would have ever broken bread with such a group of socially depraved religious outcasts, let alone attend an event held by one of them.

[25 : 24] In first century Israel, sharing a meal together was a statement of social acceptance and friendship. For the Messiah to eat with these kinds of people was beyond outrageous in the minds of the religious leaders.

We've been using the term sinners a lot, but we haven't defined the term in the way that the scribes used it. When the scribes and Pharisees called people sinners, they were thinking of the rank-and-file Jews who were not committed to in-depth study of the things of God, especially the law of God.

These people went the way of the culture and followed the customs of the day rather than the details of the Jewish law. It's not the main point of this passage, but consider this.

These religious leaders show us an important truth, and that truth is that bigotry is always ugly and pathetic. It betrays the fear and depravity of our hearts and is clear evidence that we are sinful people ourselves that desperately need the scandal of grace in our own lives, even as we proclaim that grace to others.

Jesus will certainly welcome the targets of such presidists as honored guests and beloved members of God's family, provided they come through faith in him. The scribes refused to defile themselves by going inside, but they eventually could hold their tongues no longer.

[26 : 53] Unable to quell their indignation in such a scandalous impropriety, they expressed their contempt from outside the house. Apparently, waiting until the banquet was over, the scribes cornered his disciples.

Here's how Mark records what the scribe says. Look again at verse 16. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

I tried to read that verse in a way that captured the disdain in their tone. In his account of the same event, Luke is slightly more descriptive. Listen to Luke chapter 5, verse 30.

Here's what Luke chapter 5, verse 30 says. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Notice at least two things about Luke 5, 30. It says that the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at them. And it shows that the scribes criticized the disciples for socializing with the tax collectors and sinners, too.

[28 : 11] So they didn't just rebuke Jesus, they got on his disciples as well. One pastor described the religious leader's question as the most arrogant question in the entire Bible.

That seems a little strong at first, but let's think about the scribe's question a little bit more. If someone says that another group of people is comprised of tax collectors and sinners, sinners, what is that person revealing about his own opinion of himself?

Someone who refers to another group as tax collectors and sinners in such a self-righteous, disdainful way shows that he fails to see himself as a sinner.

The religious leaders' judgmental attitudes expose the true nature of their hypocritical religion. They arrogantly considered themselves to be spiritually whole when they were spiritually blind and destitute.

Many of those they condemned as sinners were in fact the ones who had received God's gift of salvation through faith in Christ. Devoid of grace themselves, the Pharisees and scribes clung to a spiritually dead system of superficial legalism.

[29 : 26] In response, Jesus rejected their self-righteous apostasy and focused instead on people who humbly recognized their sin and repented of it. The religious leaders claimed to be holy, but they really were only superficially moral.

Their righteousness was not the result of the transformation of the heart by God. Their righteousness was an external hypocritical righteousness consisting of nothing more than rule-keeping, judgmentalism, and outward show.

The Pharisees and scribes expected Jesus and his disciples to observe their legalistic prescriptions and extra-biblical regulations. And when they did not, they rejected them with anger and resentment.

That's why the question in verse 16 perhaps is the most arrogant question in the Bible. God seeks those who recognize their sinfulness, cry out for mercy, and depend fully on God's grace.

By contrast, the Pharisees and scribes were so far from God that although they could identify other people as sinners, they were unable to recognize their own miserable condition.

[30 : 41] So far we've seen the call and the criticism. In Mark chapter 2 verse 17, we see the comeback. So the comeback is what we have last.

Jesus has a good comeback for their criticism. Look at verse 17 again. And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Jesus was speaking tongue-in-cheek when he used the word righteous here. We know that none are righteous, though some, such as the Pharisees, thought they were. Instead, Christ came to call

sinner to repentance.

Jesus did not condone the activities of sinners, but he required repentance. a change of mind that recognizes the need for a Savior and recognizes Jesus as that only Savior.

Listen to Jesus' reply as recorded in Matthew chapter 9 verses 12 and 13. It's not surprising that Matthew recorded a little more detail of that reply since he was one of those tax collectors and sinners.

[31 : 54] Matthew 9 verses 12 and 13 say, that when he heard it, that's talking about Jesus, he said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick go and learn what this means.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Using the expanded wording of Matthew 9, 12 and 13, let's dig into Jesus' reply.

MacArthur notes that Jesus' reply was a masterful reply in at least three ways. First, he used a medical analogy to illustrate the compassionate nature of his ministry to sinful people.

The Pharisees would have readily agreed that the tax collectors and sinners like Matthew were spiritually sick. Considering their condition, such sinners were obviously in need of spiritual critical care.

But Jesus' illustration exposed the calloused hearts of the Pharisees because they would have preferred that he shunned sinners instead of helping them. The Lord's analogy also exposed the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees by underscoring the fact that only those who recognize that they are sick seek out the help of a physician.

[33 : 15] Those who think they are healthy see no reason to go to the doctor. Because the Pharisees had deluded themselves into thinking that they were enjoying spiritual vitality when they actually were spiritually dead, they were unwilling to seek true life in Christ.

Second, Jesus answered the Pharisees from Old Testament scriptures. According to Matthew 9.13, he told the scribes to go and learn what this means.

I desire compassion and not sacrifice. Before we look at the scripture reference there, we need to realize this. The phrase go and learn was a rabbinic expression used to rebuke foolish ignorance. When a rabbi was upset with a student, he would tell that student to go and learn. So Jesus was telling the self-righteous scribes that they needed to go and learn something themselves.

The potency of that phrase would not have been lost on the scribes who were rabbis themselves. They weren't accustomed to being spoken to like that. The biblical quotation itself, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, comes from Hosea 6.6, where the English Standard Version uses the term steadfast love instead of mercy.

[34 : 37] Hosea 6.6 establishes the truth that God is more concerned with a merciful heart than with the hard hypocritical observance of external rights. As God told Samuel, the Lord sees not as man sees.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. In their unwillingness to show mercy to others, the Pharisees betrayed the corrupt condition of their stony hearts.

Though they claimed to rigorously keep the law, the Lord's use of Hosea 6.6 exposed their failure to do so. They prided themselves on observing the letter of the law by dutifully performing sacrifices and ceremonies, but they utterly had neglected the spirit of the law as demonstrated by their unwillingness to extend grace and mercy to those who needed it.

And then third, Jesus reiterated the purpose of his ministry by declaring, For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. In other words, the Lord's saving mission was not directed toward those who were self-righteous, but rather toward those who knew they were not righteous.

Jesus did not come to call hypocritical legalists into his kingdom. He came to save those who knew they were sinners and who would admit that they were sinners. The Pharisees, of course, and the scribes regarded themselves as righteous.

[36 : 05] Consequently, they assumed that they did not need to repent. Their delusion resulted in a fatal misdiagnosis of their spiritual condition. In their minds, they were holy, but they actually were more lost than the tax collectors who knew that they had been rejected by God.

Jesus made that point abundantly clear throughout his ministry. For another case of where Jesus made the same point, remember the parable that Jesus told in Luke 18, verses 9-14.

It's the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Here are Luke 18, verses 9-14. Speaking about Jesus, Luke 18, 9-14 say, He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that

they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. Does that sound familiar? The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like the other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[37 : 34] I tell you, this man, the tax collector, went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

The root characteristic of Jesus is that he has authority. He's authorized by God to do all that he does. He has authority to forgive sins, and he can eat with forgiven sinners.

He teaches as one who has authority. He always thinks, says, and does the things of God. God. The scribes really had no authority, because they did not teach the things of God, but the commandments of men.

They perceived themselves to be righteous and well, and in no need of a doctor or a savior, but the irony was that they needed a doctor just as much, if not more, than the tax collectors.

The message that Jesus delivered to the religious leaders in tonight's passage is the same message that Jesus delivered in Luke 18, 9-14, and that message is the same message that Jesus still delivers to everyone today.

[38 : 44] You must see yourself as lost before you can be saved. You must know that you're spiritually sick before you can be spiritually healed. You must know that you're spiritually dead in sin before you can be made spiritually alive by the savior.

The people in Jesus' day who seem to be most attracted to Jesus were those who knew that they were sinful and needed a savior. The people who seem most repulsed by Jesus were the respectable religious elite.

We've sometimes reversed that in the history of the church. The respectable religious elite are often the most comfortable in church these days. The down and out can sometimes feel the most uncomfortable in a church service.

They may believe that going to church would just make them feel worse. But the church of Jesus should herald the heart of Jesus' longing to receive sinners into his family. Those who come to him, according to John 6.37, he will not cast out.

In other words, no Pharisee should feel smugly comfortable in church. Remember the main idea. Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and underscores his purpose by calling the outcast of society.

[40 : 04] Here's another MacArthur quote. He said, the church of Jesus Christ consists not of perfect people, but of forgiven people. Believers know that they are not righteous and cannot be righteous by their own power.

Rather, they have been granted the very righteousness of God as a gift of grace through faith in Christ. On the basis of Jesus' finished work, they have been pardoned and accepted by God being trophies of his grace for all of eternity.

Levi, better known as Matthew, is an example of the transforming power of Jesus. We've looked at some cross references tonight from the book of Matthew, a book written by this same person, this Levi who made his first appearance tonight in Mark's gospel.

Levi was forbidden to enter the temple of his own people. He was considered a traitor and a failure because his previous profession turned him into an enemy of his fellow Jews.

But God changed him, and God used Levi's life after conversion and is still using his writings after conversion to help change the world. Daniel Akin wrote this about Jesus' view of Levi.

[41 : 21] Jesus saw a sinner in need of salvation, not a low life deserving condemnation. Jesus saw not the wicked life of a tax collector and extortionist, but the changed life of a disciple, an evangelist, an apostle, and a gospel writer.

That's the scandal of grace. Jesus sees in us what no one else can see and turns us into what we were intended to be, mature image bearers who reflect his glory.

All this is made possible by scandalous grace in his choice to be the friend of sinners. Listen to that last part again. Jesus sees in us what no one else can see and turns us into what we were intended to be, mature image bearers who reflect his glory.

All this is made possible by scandalous grace and his choice to be the friend of sinners. The most important message of this passage is this.

Unless we admit that we are sinners deserving of God's judgment, we cannot be saved. We know from Luke 19.10 that Jesus saves only sinners. For those of us who already are saved, this passage also invites us to think more about some other things.

[42 : 40] Earlier I asked you to consider some questions as we studied the passage. Those questions were, with whom do I most identify, the scribes or the sinners? Am I loving and serving sinners as Jesus did?

In other words, when I see blatant sinners, am I more like the scribes and Pharisees or am I more like Jesus? Regardless of how we view sinners, we all need to be more like Jesus.

When we yield to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will help us become more like Jesus. That is good news. But the passage has even more good news.

The passage shows us that we never should give up on those people whom we earnestly desire that God will save. J.C. Ryle said, We ought never to despair entirely of anyone's salvation when we read this passage of Scripture.

He who called Levi still lives and still works. The age of miracles is not yet past. The love of money is a powerful principle, but the call of Christ is even more powerful.

[43 : 47] Let us not despair even about those who sit at the tax collector's booth and enjoy the abundance of this world's good things. The voice which said to Levi, follow me, may yet reach their hearts.

We may yet see them get up, take up the cross, and follow Christ. Let us hope continually and pray for others who can tell what God may be going to do for anyone around us.

No one is too bad for Christ to call, so let us pray for all. You can see that this passage is full of hope. Jesus continued and still continues to prove what the angel told Mary's husband Joseph so long ago.

In Matthew 1.21, the angel told Joseph this, the angel said, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that during this Christmas season, we have a reminder here of why you sent Jesus to this earth.

[44 : 56] We thank you for the reminder that he has done and continues to do exactly what he said you would do. Help us be more willing to share that good news with others.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.