

Mark

“The company He keeps”

2:13-17

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I. **Introduction**

Mark records four great controversies of Jesus time and location marked by the religious leader’s verbal complaints and Jesus’ response to them. In the first two complaints they are leveled at the disciples about Jesus, the last two are spoken to the Lord about the disciples. We will only take a look at the first one today but here they are in their entirety:

- a. Vs. 13-17: “***How is it that Jesus eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners***”? What to do with the traitorous collaborators of the occupying Romans known as the Tax Collectors? Religious leaders had decided to be exclusionary and treated their treason by having no contact with them.
- b. Vs. 18-22: “***Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast***”? What place does joyous daily living have in religious life, religion is serious and solemn business? Here they had decided to be inclusionary as these opposing groups saw religion the same way.
- c. Vs. 23-28: “***Why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath***”? What is the ultimate goal of religion, to liberate humanity or to control humanity? The religious leaders had taken the position as separatists but such action made them arrogant as they pick and choose history that supported elitism.
- d. Vs. 1-6: “***They watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath***..” What is the true test of religion? The religious leaders had forgotten the standard that is at the heart of God, to do-good to His creation, to save and make whole humanity. This made the religious leaders legalists and used religion to be heartless towards humanity.

When it comes to Jesus, generally speaking, we see that He was not a fan of religion, even the one that prophesied about His coming that His Father in heaven placed Him in. And by religion I mean to say the manmade expression that sought to displace intimacy with an institution and grace with the grunts of human activity.

II. Vs. 13-14 From judged to joined

Vs. 13 Israel is the land bridge between Europe and Africa and in the ancient world all traffic must go through her. It was said that Galilee was the road to somewhere!

Preaching with Jesus was a passion not a profession and it appears that He was the founder of seaside services.

Vs. 14 Of the first 5 men that took up Jesus command to follow Him, (*four fishermen and one tax collector*) two of them directly wrote a gospel and a third (*Peter*) influenced Mark. **Jesus didn't choose PHD's to accompany Him, to write His story to the world but common men who most of academia would consider unqualified.** The great truth is that Jesus and His call upon a life is the “***great ordination***”. In the last section we read of a man who was sick with paralysis that had hindered his progress in life. Here in this story we read of a different type of paralysis that was equally debilitating, this paralysis came from a life style that manifested in an occupational choice! It too had hindered this man's progress in life and he too is given a choice to “take up his bed and go out in the presence of all.” **Jesus wanted the people no one else wanted, He offered Himself and friendship to people no one else would ever call a friend.** Matthew must have been a man with an ache in his heart, he had to have heard Jesus message from a distance, an outcast on the outskirts and something must have caused him to have hated what he had chosen in life. Jesus was looking for opportunities, He was never off duty, if there was only one man Jesus would find him. What a lesson for us “*soul gathers*” if we would look for people as we walk through life as Jesus did.

The Romans collected their taxes through a system known as **Tax Farming**, they assessed a district a fixed tax figure and then sold the right to collect to the highest bidder.

The buyer had to hand over the assessed sum at the end of the year and was allowed to keep whatever they had gathered above that. The potential exploitation and extortion was compounded because the people had no idea what they actually owed except from the tax collector's statements. It was a four tiered system:

1. **Poll tax**: All men 14-65 and women 12-65 had to pay because they were alive
2. **Ground tax**: 1/10th of all grain and 1/5th of all wine, olive oil and fish produced
3. **Income tax**: One percent of a person's annual income
4. **Taxes and tolls**: Separate taxes or tolls for using roads or harbors, sales tax on certain items for import or export duties. There was even a transportation tax on carts as each wheel was taxed

Most tax collectors made their wealth from the fourth category as they had the largest room to extort people. The Tax Collector under the full authority of Rome could stop anyone at any time and make them unpack their carts and force them to pay a tax on the spot. If the person was unable to pay they would sometime offer them a loan at a high rate of interest gaining them even more money. **They were so hated that they were not only excommunicated from the synagogues they were not allowed to serve as a judge or witness in court.**

The Greek word for "follow" means to "walk the same road". The verb tense is in the imperative mode present tense which means that it **more than an invitation** it was a **command**. Jesus was saying, "Start going on the same road as Me and continue on this road". Matthew understood this command and that the road he was on was a far different road than the one Jesus was walking on, of all the disciples Matthew truly left all he had to follow Jesus. The others could go back to their boats and fish but Matthew burned his

boat having left his tax collectors job he could not go back to it, there would be no turning back for Matthew. For his decision Matthew gained three things:

- a. ***A chance to look people in the eye***: He would not have to look down when asked what he did for a living. He may be poor fiscally but he was wealthy relationally. Because his hands were clean, his heart was now at rest.
- b. ***A better job***: His tools were still the same, *pin and parchment*, but now what his ledger recorded wasn't what was owed him but what he owed others because his debt had been paid.
- c. ***A different reputation***: Locally everyone knew Levi the "***hated***" tax collector but what the world knows now is far different because of his decision that day to follow Jesus; they now know Matthew the "***gift of God***" gospel writer.

III. Vs. 15-17 The retirement party

Vs. 15 Luke's account makes it clear that the party was at Matthew's home and the crowd that gathered were those that were not allowed at the synagogue nor near a rabbi but on this occasion Mathew's home became the synagogue as the Rabbi made a house call.

What happened after Matthew's call most likely came about after some time but Matthew filled his home with people who were just as paralyzed in sin as he had been that they might have the opportunity to be set free. Jesus was not invited to make toasts, He had been invited to make the same offer He had to Levi, "Follow Me". But the place was not just filled up with quests as there were close by critics who would diagnose the illness but offer no cure! The name "*Pharisee*" means "*separated ones*" as they separated themselves form anything and anyone they considered unholy.

Vs. 16 Their observation was correct Jesus did sit among tax collectors and sinners and He still does! ***Jesus never views people as rejects or outcasts He sees them as patients!***

C.T. Studd who gave up his fortune to serve in the jungles of Africa once said: "*Some like to dwell within the sound of church bells, but I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of Hell!*"

Vs. 17 In Jesus' reply as to why He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners he says

He was there not to partake, He was there to liberate! Jesus' answer is in two parts:

- a. **First a proverb:** *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”*. Jesus was not implying that the Pharisees were spiritually healthy or were righteous only that they thought of themselves as such. Their problem was twofold: Their blindness to their own condition was seen first in that weren't engaged in the spiritual healing of others. Second since they saw themselves as spiritual healthy and righteous they remained outside of Jesus as their cure!
- b. **Second the application:** *“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”* They had questioned His ethics and Jesus said that they had **misdiagnosed His physical presence as condoning sin instead liberating people** from sin. **None are more sick than the diseased who think themselves as well and none are more manifesting sin as those who think themselves as holy!**

Jesus said, *“You're right on with your diagnosis, these are sick and hurting people, but your remedy of exclusion and isolation isn't the answer. A doctor needs to be among the sick if I they are going to administer the remedy.”* That's the marvelous truth about Jesus, **“You would always find Him amongst the hurting.”** Jesus spoke as the cure for moral failing and **His reply makes two things abundantly clear:**

1. **The self-sufficient are the sickest:** Jesus indicates that those that see themselves as without a need are in actuality the social outcasts and have the greatest need. There is never a treatment, not even from Jesus, for the person who fails to recognize that they are ill. It is a terrible tragedy for most of humanity that we have to hit bottom before we will look up to Jesus to be healed. Most people have

to have the bottom drop out of their dreams of importance and self-reliance before they will even consider Jesus.

2. **People are more important than religious prejudices:** We all have prejudices, notions formed either before we have sufficient information or because we have adopted mistaken ideas. Many of these are passed down from our ancestors. Placing people before prejudices doesn't mean that we except sinful destructive behavior any more than we except cancer! No it means that we don't allow our preconceived views to get in the way of introducing the person to the Great Physician.

Jesus is the perfect doctor to heal us of our sin.

- *He is always available.*
- *He always makes a perfect diagnosis.*
- *He provides a complete cure.*
- *He even pays the bill!*