



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V22 N26

July 12, 2020

KING JESUS

"Dinner with Sinners"

Mark 2:13-17

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Identity in Christ

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
John 1:12



Who has Jesus come to help?

There is no whitewashing of the tax collectors and sinners in Mark's story about a banquet hosted by Levi and attended by Jesus (2:13-17). In the eyes of the teachers of the law — many of whom were Pharisees — these two factions of society were the worst of the worst.

Regarding the first, "tax collectors" had a seedy reputation as unscrupulous servants of the Roman occupiers. According to one commentator: "The Jews despised tax collectors because they worked for the Romans and because they often extorted money for Rome from their fellow Jews. Levi worked for Herod Antipas since he lived in Capernaum. A major road passed through Capernaum connecting Damascus and the Mediterranean coast. The taxes Levi collected at his 'tax booth' included: export and import fees, sales and custom taxes, and various tolls" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Mark," 2020 ed., 60, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/mark.pdf). Another adds: "Such officials were detested everywhere and were classed with the vilest of men . . . When a Jew entered the customs service he was regarded as an outcast from society: he was disqualified as a judge or a witness in a court session, was excommunicated from the synagogue, and in the eyes of the community his disgrace extended to his family" (William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT, 103).

Regarding the second, "sinners" neither observed the scruples of the Pharisees nor met the moral demands of the law. While the term has been taken in a narrow sense to refer to "people of the land" who simply did not observe Pharisaic standards of ritual cleanliness, it more likely refers to flagrant violators of the Mosaic law (see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC, 71) — in which case,

the first would also be true. The two kinds of banquet guests presented two kinds of problems for the scribes. "They knew, or assumed, that Jesus would be offered non-kosher food or food that had not been properly tithed, or that Jesus might be defiled by contact with unclean dishes or with the clothes of ritually unclean people in the close quarters of a meal (Marcus, p. 227). And since sharing a meal with someone might have been seen as a symbol of identification, Jesus' social contact with tax collectors and people who had the reputation of sinners was dubious, since righteous people heed the warning about 'becoming bedfellows with sinners' (1 En. 97:4)" (Schnabel, 72).

Why are they so intolerant of Jesus? On the one hand, the teachers of the law do not understand his mission. He has come as a doctor to treat the sick, not the healthy, which makes contact with sinners not only unavoidable, but also desirable. He has come preaching "the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (1:15), and has demonstrated that he has the authority to forgive sins, thereby preparing people for the kingdom. Furthermore, the tax collectors and sinners who attended Levi's banquet are among "the many who followed him" (v. 15), which strongly suggests that at least some if not all have repented, availed themselves of Jesus' forgiveness, and become his disciples. In a nutshell, they are no longer, spiritually speaking, the people that they once were; they have a new spiritual identity. They were once all that the pejorative, "tax collectors and sinners," suggests, but that is in the past. They are no longer *sick sinners*, for they have been forgiven, and are now *healthy righteous* people ready for the coming of the kingdom (cf., 1Co 6:9-11).



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

13 *Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

15 *While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

17 *On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

READ in another translation

13 *He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 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.*

15 *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. 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?" 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (ESV)*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "once again" in v. 13.
- Circle "teach" in v. 13.
- Bracket "Levi son of Alphaeus" in v. 14.
- Circle "tax collector's booth" in v. 14.
- Circle "many" in v. 15.
- Bracket "teachers of the law who were Pharisees" in v. 16.
- Highlight "tax collectors and sinners" in vv. 15, 16 (2x, once in reverse order).
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 17

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Why did Mark use “once again” to describe Jesus’ teaching by the lake?
 2. What was Jesus teaching the crowd that came to him?
 3. What was Levi’s other name? Explain how you know (see Lk 5:27; cf., Mt 9:9; 10:3).
 4. What did “following Jesus” entail for Levi, a tax collector?
 5. How different is it for us?
 6. Identify the “*many* who followed him” and what you infer from their identity.
 7. What did the teachers of the law have against eating with tax collectors and sinners?
 8. The question they asked Jesus’ disciples sounds a *pejorative* tone. How so?
 9. Identify the “doctor,” “the healthy,” and “the sick” in Jesus’ analogy.
 10. **Discussion:** Jesus said, “I have *not* come to call the *righteous*.” Talk about what he means.
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Commentary On The Text

Mark 2:13-17 contains the second of five episodes in this section (2:1-3:6) describing a number of controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees (cf., 2:16, 18, 24; 3:2, 6) that end with the Jewish leaders plotting to kill him (3:6). Mark's barebones description of Levi's call (vv. 13-14) serves to introduce the tax collector and set the stage for the approaching dinner controversy, involving the scribes' question, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (v. 16).

Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee (v. 13; cf., 1:16) where he again teaches a crowd about the nearness of the kingdom of God, calling on his hearers to "repent and believe the good news" (1:15). News about him has continued to spread like wildfire. Growing numbers of people are captivated by manifestations of his authority. He teaches without quoting other rabbis (1:22), exorcises terrified demons (vv. 25-26), heals the desperately ill (vv. 30-31), including even lepers (vv. 41-42), forgives sins (2:5), and reverses long-term paralysis to prove it (vv. 11-12). No wonder everywhere he goes crowds follow.

As he walks along, he comes across Levi, identified as Matthew in his Gospel (9:9; 10:3), and issues a call similar to the one he has issued to Simon and Andrew (1:17), as well as James and John (v. 19), and Levi responds in a way similar to the way they did. He immediately gets up and follows Jesus. Like them, he is destined to become one of the Twelve; unlike them, if things go wrong, he cannot return to his former livelihood. One commentator writes: "Levi gave up a lucrative business when he chose to follow Jesus. A fisherman might return to fishing, but a tax collector could not return to his job, since many people competed for this career—even though it involved social ostracism. Nonetheless, Levi responded immediately to Jesus' gracious and authoritative invitation to 'start following with Me, and continue to do so as a habit of life'" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Mark," 2020 ed., 67, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/mark.pdf).

Having set the stage, Mark goes on to recount what happened at a dinner hosted by Levi for Jesus and some of Levi's tax collector and sinner friends. The fact that the dinner guests "reclined at table" (ESV) suggests that this was, in Luke's words, "a great banquet" (5:29), not an everyday meal. On the significance of eating together, one commentator explains: "Eating a meal together meant something in Jesus' world that it does not mean today in the West. Hospitality was a sacred duty in the ancient Near East. When someone invited someone else to eat with him, he was extending

a pledge of loyalty and protection to that person. To accept an invitation to dinner implied a willingness to become a close friend of the host. Jesus' acceptance of table fellowship with 'sinners' (i.e., outcasts) conveyed by action the forgiveness that He gave verbally in 2:5" (Constable, 68).

But is the occasion evangelistic or celebratory? Has Levi invited guests to introduce them to Jesus, as one commentator says? "It seems that this meal was in the nature of a reception given by Levi to his old business acquaintances, to enable them to meet his new-found master" (R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, TNTC, 122). Or has he invited guests who, like himself, have responded to Jesus' message of forgiveness and are following him, as verse 15 says? "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many tax collectors and sinners who followed him." Perhaps the occasion is both. On the one hand, can Levi be the only one in attendance who has responded favorably to Jesus' teaching—other than the disciples accompanying Jesus? That's possible, yet seems unlikely. But on the other hand, can all there be Jesus' followers? That, too, is possible, yet seems unlikely. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that sharing a meal with Jesus likely means that Levi's guests are either following, or are at least are considering following Jesus (see Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 129).

When the Pharisaic scribes see what's going on, they ask Jesus' disciples the accusatory, pejorative question, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" They would never do such a thing (see p. 1). To eat with the outcasts of Jewish society would be unthinkable. Overhearing their question, Jesus answers with a proverb, likening himself to a doctor and sinners to the sick. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (v. 17), he tells them. It's a common proverb with numerous parallels in Greek and Jewish literature. Then he goes on to say, "I have not come to call the righteous," namely, those who ironically see themselves as healthy, "but sinners," namely, those who see themselves as sick and in need of a doctor. The point of Jesus' analogy, the point Mark intends to drive home, is obvious. "Just as physicians work among the sick in order to bring healing, so Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is able to forgive sins (2:10), ministers to sinners to offer them the forgiveness of sins" (Stein, 131).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 13 *Once again* Cf., 1:16. "Jesus returns to the sea. As he passes along the shore (see 1:16), he once again singles out a person and challenges him to follow him. This time it is a tax official, Levi son of Alphaeus, busy with his duties at the tax office, just as the fishermen had been with their nets" (David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, 103). "Jesus is frequently described as engaged in open-air preaching, especially beside the Sea of Galilee, where many villages were clustered round the shore of the lake in thickly populated Galilee (see Josephus). One reason for this choice may have been that the sloping shore provided a convenient amphitheatre for a large audience, especially if Jesus preached from a boat moored just offshore in shallow water (as apparently in 4:1)" (R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, TNTC, 122).

v. 13 *teach* "Mark once again notes Jesus' public teaching and his continuing popularity. Jesus leaves Simon's house and goes down to the Sea of Galilee. What Jesus did in the synagogue (1:21), he did in public by the lake: he was teaching, explaining his proclamation of the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God and the need for repentance and faith (1:15)" (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC, 69).

v. 14 *Levi son of Alphaeus* I.e., Matthew (cf., 3:18). Jesus apparently called three sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew (1:16), James and John (1:19), and Levi/Matthew and James (3:18) (see Schnabel, 70-71; contra Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Mark," 2020 ed., 68, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/mark.pdf).

v. 14 *tax collector's booth* Levi was likely a collector of toll taxes rather than income or property taxes. Toll collectors "were engaged in 'sales, customs, and road' tolls (Donahue 1971). Levi was probably an employee at a toll station on the Via Maris, a heavily traveled trade route running from Damascus to Caesarea through Capernaum, working for a man who had bought the right to collect such tolls. These tolls would have been collected for Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea" (Stein, 126).

v. 15 *Levi's house* Levi's house or Jesus' house? According to one commentator, "The 'house' in Mark is connected to Jesus (Levi follow him and sits at table in his house; see 2:1; 3:19; 7:17;

24; 9:33; 10:10). Jesus then serves as the host of a rag-tag assemblage of social pariahs" (Garland, 104). However, it is unlikely that the reference is to Jesus' house and to a banquet hosted by him (cf., Lk 5:29). Given it was Levi's house, the scribes question means, "Why does Jesus eat in the houses of toll collectors and other sinners?" and not "Why does Jesus invite toll collectors and sinners to eat in his home?"

v. 15 *many* "Many who followed him" probably refers to "tax collectors and sinners" rather than disciples in general (cf., "many tax collectors and sinners" mentioned earlier in the verse). Contra "there were many (disciples) who followed Jesus, not just the five mentioned so far in Mark's Gospel" (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 113).

v. 16 *teachers of the law* "Though 'scribe' denotes an occupation rather than membership in a religious sect, many scribes were associated with the Pharisees (cf. Acts 23:9) . . . The Pharisees were the most influential of the three main Jewish sects . . . In contrast to the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, the existence of angels and demons, both predestination and free will (Luke 20:27; Acts 23:6-9; cf. also Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.2-3 §§11-15), and the validity of both the written and the oral law (Mark 7:2-5)" (Stein, 129).

v. 16 *Why does he . . .* "This is not an innocent question on the part of the scribes seeking clarification. It is a *hostile accusation in the form of a question* (cf. 2:7). To eat with someone implied acceptance of them as friends and 'brothers' (cf. Matt. 15:1-2; Luke 15:1-2; 19:7; Acts 11:2-18, esp. 2-3; Gal. 2:11-14; Jeremias 1971: 115-16)" (Stein, 130, italics added).

v. 16 *tax collectors and sinners* "Sinners" most likely refers to *morally* unclean people as opposed to *ritually* unclean people (see Stein, 130).

v. 17 *the righteous* I.e., an ironic reference to the teachers of the law. "The well [rendered "the healthy" in the NIV] and the righteous correspond to the scribes of the Pharisees (2:16a). It is very doubtful, however, that either Jesus or Mark would describe them as righteous except in an ironic capacity" (Stein, 131).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Like a doctor, Jesus Christ has come to offer forgiveness to all sinners who see themselves as sick, rather than the self-righteous, who ironically see themselves as healthy.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

When I was in school, I always wanted to hang out with the “cool” kids. It was a huge issue for me because I wanted so desperately to fit in and be known by the people that my peers deemed as the popular kids. I always thought that if I got x,y,z, that it would elevate my status, so I spent so much of my youth trying to act, look, and talk like the “cool” kids. It was exhausting and never worth it. By the end of my time in high school I realized that the popular kids that I so badly wanted to fit in with were actually making terrible decisions that were not things I wanted to be a part of. I had to recognize my situation for what it was, rather than what I thought it could be. I think the Pharisees in the Bible were the “cool” kids. They acted like they had it all together and they portrayed themselves as perfect. They were the people everyone looked up to and probably hoped to be like. However, these are the people who were living in sin and they did not even recognize it. Jesus called the Pharisees out in Mark 2:17 explaining to them that He came to save sinners. Much like I came to realize that the cool kids in my school were not actually as cool as I thought, Jesus points this out to the Pharisees. Both groups were living lives that seemed so desirable, but really, they were the ones who had it wrong. The right way to live is a life surrendered and dedicated to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Mark 2:13-17.

1. When Jesus calls Levi, what does Levi do?
2. How do the Pharisees see the people Jesus is eating with?
3. What do you think Jesus means when He tells the Pharisees that he came *not* to call the righteous, but sinners?

What Do You Think?

The Pharisees were not willing to love the tax collectors because they were sinners and the Pharisees did not like them. Are you sometimes like the Pharisees who were not willing to love people who are hard to love? Who is on your heart right now that you could love better even though they may not be making the best decisions?

What Do You Do?

Now that you have someone on your heart, pray that God will help you love them well. Whatever God leads you to do, whether that be write them a letter, call them on the phone, share a meal with them, or just to pray for them, let us know. Email kidpix@wearecentral.org to tell us!

CORE COMPETENCY: Humanity

I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as our Savior.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 34:1-3

I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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