



The Son of Man and Sinners

Key idea:

Jesus did not come to shun those who were separate from God, but rather to seek them out so that they might return to God.

Key text:

Mark 2:13–17

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."

Key points:

1. Jesus called Levi the tax collector to be His disciple, and like the others before him, this tax collector abandons everything to follow Jesus.
2. Tax collectors were despised and rejected in Jewish society, both for their collusion with the hated Romans and also for the way that most of them became rich - by cheating their fellow Jews and overcharging them on their taxes.
3. Jesus scandalized the scribes of the Pharisees by eating with tax collectors and "sinners" - the type of people the Pharisees with whom the Pharisees would not associate.
4. The "sinners" included people who violated God's Law, and also those who simply could not follow all of the extra rules created by the oral tradition.
5. Jesus used the proverb of a doctor treating the sick to show the foolishness of the Pharisee's approach, declaring that He had come to reach out to sinners, not to shun them.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. Why does Mark begin this passage with Jesus away from town by the lake, the crowds still coming after Him, and Jesus teaching them the Word of God?
3. Why does Mark specify that Levi was a tax collector? What does that tell me about Jesus and the people He calls into His service? What does that tell me about His ability to work in my life and use me?
4. Was it possible for one to be a tax collector and a follower of Jesus? What do the words of John the Baptist in Luke 3:12-13 tell me about this? Since the Roman tax system encouraged cheating, how would one work as a Christian tax collector?
5. We know that Jesus' inner circle of 12 disciples also contained Simon the Zealot. The Zealots fomented revolt against the Romans and even advocated killing tax collectors in some cases. How were Simon and Matthew the tax collector able to follow Jesus as disciples together? What does this tell me about my allegiance to Jesus as compared to all other allegiances and philosophies?
6. Luke records this story in Luke 5:27-32. It is very similar to Mark's account, but he records that Jesus said "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." What do the words "to repentance" tell me about the call of Jesus to sinful humans?
7. Why are people so tempted to define in and out groups of people, and to shun those who are not part of our group? Why are religious people also tempted to act in this way?
8. Am I more tempted to try and avoid people who think and live differently than I do or to compromise my beliefs to go along with the crowd?
9. What group do I find myself wanting to shun and avoid? How can I let Jesus change my heart and actions toward this group?
10. Who will I call or see to invite to gather with the church this week?