

Jesus demonstrated His love for sinners by calling a tax collector, a member of the most hated professions among Jews, to be one of His disciples. Jesus then ate a meal with this tax collector and his friends, all of whom were also among the despised of Jewish society. If Jesus had only come to accept the righteous then no one could ever be saved, for we are all sinners in desperate need of His love and mercy.

Verses 1-12: Jesus has returned to Capernaum after preaching in many of the other towns around Galilee (Mark 1:38-39) and is preaching in a house. The house was so full of people gathered to hear him that four men who were carrying a paralytic friend on a bed could not get him to Jesus in order for their friend to be healed. Their solution was to disassemble the roof of the house and lower their friend on his bed in front of Jesus, Who recognized their faith and healed the man. However, certain scribes were there that believed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy because they heard Him tell the paralytic that his sins were forgiven even though only God can forgive sins. However, Jesus proved that He not only had the power to forgive sins but also to heal.

13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

“And he went forth again by the sea side” – Since Capernaum was a seaside town, it was a short walk from the town to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The seaside seemed to be a favorite place for Jesus to go, perhaps because the open air was more accommodating to the large crowds that were following Him.

“and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them” – Large crowds always seemed to gather wherever Jesus went and He frequently used it as an opportunity to teach the people.

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

“And as he passed by” – One commentator suggested that this was when Jesus left the house where He was staying (probably Simon’s house) and going to the seaside to teach. It’s also possible that this was at the end of the day when Jesus was coming back to town. As Jesus made His way to (or from) the seaside, He sees Levi.

“he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom [toll or tax]” – Levi is also known as Matthew, as we see in Matthew’s account of His calling by Jesus. **Matt. 9:9** *“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.”* The fact that Levi was “sitting at the receipt of custom” meant that he was a tax collector sitting in the place where people were required to come to pay their taxes to the Roman government. Tax collectors (otherwise known as publicans) were despised by the Jews because they collected taxes for the Roman government from their fellow countrymen and were thus considered traitors to their people.

“and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him” – Any self-respecting rabbi would never choose such a person to be one of his disciples and yet Jesus specifically chose to call Levi the tax collector to follow Him. Thank God that Jesus shows such grace that He chooses those that the world considers to be unworthy! **1 Cor. 1:26-29** *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”*

15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

“And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house” – Apparently later that day after Jesus had called him to follow Him, Levi invited Jesus to supper at his house. According to Luke, this was not a simple meal but a feast that Levi held in Jesus’ honor (**Luke 5:29** *“And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them”*).

“many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples” – Not only did Levi host Jesus and His disciples, but he apparently invited all his friends and acquaintances to the feast so that they could meet Jesus. The publicans were the other tax collectors and the word “sinners” was a term used by the Jews for those who had no respect for the Mosaic Law or rabbinic traditions. The publicans and sinners together represented some of the most despised and hated people in Jewish society.

“for there were many” – Since Mark has already stated that there were “many publicans and sinners” and then states again “there were many” shows that he wants to emphasize the large number of people at Levi’s feast. This statement indicates that Levi had become wealthy as a tax collector since he was able to put on a feast for so many people in his house. It also implies how many publicans and sinners that Levi knew.

“and they followed him” – This is probably the reason that Levi invited as many of his friends to the feast as he could: he wanted them to hear Jesus and to begin to follow him. He was so excited to be following Jesus himself that he wanted all his friends to do so as well. Apparently these publicans and sinners began following Jesus and listening to Him teach (**Luke 15:1** [well after the feast at Levi’s house – Luke 5:29] *“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him”*).

16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

We see the contrast between the mindset of the scribes and Pharisees and the mindset of Jesus. Eating a meal with someone indicated fellowship and friendship, and the scribes and Pharisees would never have considered sitting at a meal with people such as publicans and sinners. They considered themselves to be too holy and righteous to associate and possibly defile themselves with such people. They could not believe that Jesus, Who claimed to preach and teach for God, would fellowship with these people.

17 When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

“When Jesus heard it” – Jesus heard the scribes and Pharisees expressing to the disciples their disbelief that Jesus would eat with publicans and sinners. They demanded to know why He would do such a thing, since that would disqualify Him as a Godly teacher in their way of thinking.

“he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick” – When Jesus heard their question, He responds by pointing out the need of these publicans and sinners. They did not need to be ostracized but to be shown the right way, much like the fact that sick people are the ones who need a physician. For Jesus to only minister to “righteous” people would be as pointless as a physician who only treated healthy people.

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” – The purpose of a physician is to treat sick people and the reason that Jesus came was to minister to sinners, calling them to repentance so that they can become righteous through faith in Him.

18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

“And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast” – Mark is calling attention to the practice of fasting observed by the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees. This fasting was the twice-a-week fast that was observed in orthodox Judaism in Jesus’ day. The Pharisee in Jesus’ parable who believed that he was more righteous than the publican who had also went to pray in the temple listed fasting as one of his “good deeds” that made him righteous (**Luke 18:12** “*I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*”).

“and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?” – They seem to be implying that Jesus’ disciples fell short in their religious duties and were not as righteous as they were because they did not fast like the disciples of John and the Pharisees.

19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

Fasting was usually associated with mourning or times of great spiritual need. The expression “children of the bridechamber” referred to the guests attending a wedding. Jewish weddings in Jesus’ day were different from modern weddings. Once engaged to his future bride, the bridegroom would go away to prepare a place for him and his bride to live. Once preparations were complete, the bridegroom would return for his bride surrounded by the wedding party amid great rejoicing. He would bring the bride to his house and have a great celebration with his guests. Jesus is saying here that when the bridegroom is present, is not not a time for fasting but a time for celebration. Jesus is also identifying Himself as the bridegroom and His presence is not a reason to fast.

20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

Jesus is referring to the time period when He would be separated from His disciples that began at the crucifixion and has still not yet ended today. There will be a reason to fast during those days until He returns.

21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

Jesus uses two parables/illustrations to show that mixing the old and new covenants will not work, because the two are incompatible. The first parable concerns attempting to repair an old garment, whose material has already shrunk from washing and wear, with a piece of new, unshrunk cloth. A patch made over a hole with such unshrunk cloth will eventually shrink and pull away at the older material surrounding the hole, making the hole worse. Attempting to bring practices and traditions of the old covenant and apply them to the new covenant of grace under Christ will likewise cause problems due to their incompatibility.

22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Wine bottles in Jesus’ day were wineskins – essentially leather bags. Old wineskins no longer had the elasticity to hold new wine which would expand as it fermented. Filling the old wineskins with new wine would lead to them eventually bursting, losing the wine and ruining the wineskin. New wine must be put into new wineskins that are capable of holding their contents. This parable says that we must live under the new covenant with new covenant practices instead of attempting to do so using old covenant practices.

Verses 23-45: The next sabbath day the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of working on the sabbath because they were plucking ears of grain in a field in order to feed themselves. Jesus exposed the legalism of the Pharisees by pointing out the OT example of David eating bread that was not lawful for him or his men to eat and yet they did not sin by doing so. Jesus stated that God created the sabbath to benefit man instead of creating man in order to serve the sabbath.

Chapter 3: The Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the sabbath because He healed a man on the sabbath but Jesus asked them if it was lawful to do good or evil on the sabbath. Next, Jesus traveled to the seashore once again and boarded a ship so that he could teach without being thronged by the enormous crowd that had gathered because He was healing many and casting out devils. Jesus then went to a mountain and chose twelve disciples to be with Him. Afterward Jesus went to a house but He was thronged again by a large crowd. Scribes tried to say that Jesus was able to cast out devils because He Himself was possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. However, Jesus pointed out their logical fallacy of believing that Satan would work against his own kingdom.