

Eating with Sinners

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Date: 01 July 2018

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[0 : 0 0] beside the sea and all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them. 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. I suppose one of the hazard, maybe hazard isn't the right word, one of the challenges in going through a complete book of the Bible is that inevitably there are going to be overlaps, there are going to be echoes from what we've already preached on you know some years before. Those of you who have been in the congregation a little while you'll know that I believe it or not it was some four and a half years ago that we actually looked at the call of Jesus' disciples. We looked at each of the twelve disciples. We looked at their character, we looked in some cases the call of Jesus to them. We looked at the instances in the New Testament where their words, where their actions were recorded and of course one of these disciples is this man here,

Levi son of Alphaeus or you know him better of course as Matthew. And when we were looking at the call of Matthew we looked at Matthew's own account of Jesus' call to him. We looked at his own account in Matthew chapter 9. But when you compare Matthew 9 with Mark chapter 2 it's interesting even though Mark is a very concise writer, even though Mark generally speaking is far more compressed in his relaying the life of Jesus. Yet in Mark's account of the call of Matthew, we refer to him as Matthew, it's actually longer, it's actually slightly longer than Matthew's own account of himself.

So, you know, we will look again at the call of Matthew. There are slightly different emphases that Mark gives us of that call. But we will look at it, we look at obviously, we'll look again at the context. We'll look at the call itself and then we'll look at the accusations against Jesus because of his calling of Matthew. And then we'll look at the authority of Jesus in his calling. Sinners such as ourselves to him. Well, the context, that's why we read from verse 40 because, you know, Mark in his gospel, he's addressing the whole aspect of Jesus, the son of God. And Mark wants to bring out this whole aspect of Jesus' mission. And the consequence of that mission, certainly, you know, not long after Jesus begins his ministry, one of the immediate consequences is that there's disruption. Disruption to that mission.

What do I mean by disruption? Well, we saw, for example, in the first instance from verse 40, the leper who was cleansed, who was healed. What's the disruption? Well, of course, Jesus told the leper, you know, not to spread the news about this healing, but instead to go to the priest who alone could declare that this man was clean. But of course, what does the man do? He spreads the word. So much so that we're told Jesus has to go to a desolate place. He has to go to the wilderness because Jesus doesn't want to be seen or to be reckoned as simply as a miracle maker. He's come to bring the good news of salvation in him. He's not come primarily to make himself appear simply as this man who performs miracles. So there's that disruption. Jesus having to go to a solitary place away from the crowds who were trying to, you know, follow Jesus famous, as well. And then secondly, we saw Jesus here in the paralytic, the man who was lowered down from the rooftop by four friends. Jesus heals the man. He heals his soul. He heals his body. He declares to the man, son, your sins are forgiven. And as soon as these words are pronounced, what do we find? Verse 6, the scribes are saying, why does this man speak like this? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And so again, there's that opposition to Jesus. So soon after Jesus begins his public ministry. And then when we come to the calling of Levi, the start of chapter 13, we're told Jesus went out again beside the sea immediately after he's healed the paralytic and the response of the crowd. They're amazed. They're glorifying God. We've never seen anything like this. There's no indication here that the crowd, as a crowd, follow Jesus, honoring him, adoring him, worshiping him. They're amazed. They're astonished. And what do we find in chapter 13? He goes beside the sea. And, you know, when you focus on that particular verse or part of the verse, it would seem very

likely that what Mark is telling us is that here's Jesus going to another isolated place. Because why? And with the association of disruption around, opposition around. Because, you know, elsewhere in Scripture, elsewhere in the

New Testament, so often the sea has associations with conflict and turmoil. You know, the raging of the sea. That raging of the sea that speaks of the raging of the opposition to Jesus. And that's going to be seen again and again as Mark, as other gospel writers tell us, of the ministry of Jesus and proclaiming the good news of salvation in him. That opposition that reaches right to the cross itself.

[5 : 49] So, now that we've got that context, let's look at the call. Let's look at the call that Jesus gives to Matthew to Matthew, Levi, son of Alphaeus, to follow him. And what do we notice again? The purity of the Pharisees. You know, Jesus associating with these outcasts, the tax collectors and so-called sinners, the call, the call. Verse 14, Jesus 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. So, what about the call itself? It's given in a very brief manner. Because, as you know, Jesus is no longer isolated. He's not in the wilderness. He's not even beside the Sea of Galilee. He's back teaching, on his own, he's back teaching the crowds. Obviously, the crowds have found him. But as he's teaching the crowds, notice, he addresses one individual. One individual to follow him, to follow Jesus as a disciple. And just two words of command. Follow me. What do we find? Levi, son of Alphaeus, Matthew. He gets up from his tax desk and he follows Jesus. A simple telling of a most profound work of God's grace in the life of this one individual. And you might ask, well, where's the focus in all this? Is it Levi? Is it Matthew?

Or is it Jesus? Well, of course, it has to be Jesus. Again, you know, if you look at from verse 13, 14 and 15, look at the number of times the personal pronoun is used. He or him. Notice, you know, he, him, right through these just few verses. So, in other words, he, him, all referring to Jesus.

Almost all, anyway, referring to Jesus. Now, you know, in other words, the focus is on Jesus and his call to this individual. You see, some people might argue, and I've argued it myself at times, but I think wrongly. There is the argument that, you know, that Levi, that Matthew had already, must have already heard of Jesus, you know, sitting at his tax booth in Capernaum, that maybe had some previous knowledge of Jesus, that hastened his response to Jesus.

But the text doesn't give us that information. Keeps to the text, keeps to the passage. All we're told here is of the direct call of Jesus to Levi. So, we're seeing here the authority of Jesus, that that's sufficient to elicit this response of obedience to this individual who's been called.

So, in other words, it's the claim of Jesus on this individual. That's what's been highlighted here. This claim of authority. This exclusive call of Jesus with the response of faith in Jesus.

[8 : 53] All of him. It's all of Jesus. And, you know, as we remain focused on Jesus here and the call of Jesus to Levi, we're surely seeing something very significant happening. Because there's Levi. Just picture him at his tax booth.

Jesus has called him. But, you know, there's so much within that statement itself. If he's at the tax booth, therefore he's regarded within Jewish society as one of the outcasts.

Why? Well, he works for the puppet ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas. Herod who collaborated with the hated Roman occupiers. So, Levi, as a tax collector with that connection with the Roman occupiers, shunned. Shunned in society.

He was excluded from the synagogue. Even his family were guilty by association. You know, in many ways, just like the leper. Remember the leper?

He was shunned by society because he was regarded as unclean. Well, look at Levi because of his social position. Shunned as an outcast from society.

[9 : 59] But Jesus didn't look at Levi's social position. Jesus saw a man who needed salvation. Jesus saw a man who was a sinner just as every other sinner.

Jesus saw a man who must be called to himself, called to Jesus. And doing so by Jesus' own authority. So, in other words, Levi is not following Jesus by his own initiative.

Levi has been called. Called, passive, called. Jesus is doing the calling. So, keep that focus on Jesus. And when you keep that focus on the Lord Jesus, what do you see?

You see the love of Jesus. You see the grace of Jesus. You see that grace of the Lord Jesus towards all who are called. Including the outcasts. Including the marginalized.

Including the despised. You know, the call of Jesus. There's no template to that call. You know, regarding who and who isn't saved.

[11 : 03] It might be the neighbor who's ridiculed your faith over many years whom Jesus calls. It might be the person who ignores you because you're a Christian.

It might be the colleague who mocks you for attending the Lord's services and the Lord's Day. It might be the family member who once came to church as a child.

It might be a brother or a sister like myself who once came to God's house but is nowhere near it. But Jesus is no respecter of persons. Jesus will call.

He will call. And he will call. He'll call by his grace. He'll call by his undeserved grace. He'll call by his grace.

He'll call by his grace. That grace that tells wholly and completely of God's love for sinners. It tells of his love for you and it tells of my undeserved merit.

[11 : 58] That undeserved calling that God gives to those who are called to follow Jesus. And when you realize it's all of grace, you realize it's the grace of the Lord Jesus that saves.

And it's not for any of us to question that call. You know, Lord Jesus may call someone who might appear the most unlikely of converts.

And that person is called and gifted the faith to believe. But we still extend the hand of fellowship, the hand of friendship to the individual who's called.

Think of Matthew here. There's Matthew. He's going to be amongst the twelve disciples. Now in all likelihood, Matthew, a tax collector in Capernaum, you have people like Peter, James, John, Andrew, they were fishermen.

Of course, we can't say it for certain, but in all likelihood, he would have taxed these individuals. And yet he's still counted amongst the group of disciples during Jesus' ministry and after Jesus' resurrection and into the early church.

[13 : 07] There's nothing in Scripture that tells us of any hostility, any hesitancy, you know, in accepting Matthew as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Nothing from the other disciples and any questioning.

Jesus called to Matthew. Matthew would become a disciple because he was called by Jesus. And that discipleship, as we see in the passage here, that would involve a turning away from his former ways and a turning to Jesus.

A complete turner because that's what conversion is, a complete turner around in a life that's characterized by, well, by true costly discipleship.

You see that in the verse 14, and he rose and followed him. And he rose. An action at a particular point in time. And followed him.

An action at a particular point in time. At that particular point in time, Matthew was converted. At a particular point in time, Matthew could say, I was converted, my life was changed because of the call of Jesus.

[14 : 18] Now, Matthew, of course, didn't know where that call would lead him to. But he knew that in following Jesus, he could do no other. And you who've responded in faith to the call of Jesus to follow him, well, you know that it was his call that has made you that disciple.

But it's not follow me plus. It's not follow me and I'll show you exactly what's going to happen to you and your discipleship for the rest of your life. No, the call of Jesus involves faith.

Trusting in him to lead you in the call that he's given you. Now, think of Matthew. Think of Matthew. I mean, in God's providence, Matthew would be one of the gospel writers.

It would take another 40 years at least before Matthew actually wrote down these words. It wasn't immediate. It's interesting, again, in scripture, there's actually very, very little written about Matthew himself other than at this particular point of his call after this.

There's hardly anything written about Matthew. But in God's perfect timing, Matthew would be used to write, as we said about 40 years later, this gospel.

[15 : 33] But Matthew in these years, even in the immediate years of his discipleship, even in these 40 years in the early church, Matthew would follow Jesus. Matthew would serve him as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

As you, as I, must follow Jesus. As we must follow the Lord Jesus, the Saviour Jesus. Jesus isn't an idea.

He's not a concept. He's not a figment of imagination. He's the living Lord Jesus who died for you and lives evermore to intercede for you. So, you follow the Lord Jesus, your Saviour.

And in all that that implies, it implies, of course, it implies trust. It implies faith. It involves service. It involves obedience. It involves love and fervency and humility, prayer, gratitude, a life of gratitude. And when you're following the Lord Jesus, you'll want others to follow him as well. You'll seek for others to follow the Saviour. And that's exactly what we find here in this passage.

[16:45] Because as Matthew was called to follow Jesus, Matthew wanted others to know the Lord Jesus. As their Saviour, see that in verse 15.

Jesus is with them and another invited guest in Matthew's house. Of course, who are the guests? Who do we find there in verse 15? As he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Those whom the religious elite considered outcasts. Those whom no self-respecting Pharisee would consider worthy of even being at the same table with.

Let alone for Jesus to be with these tax collectors and sinners. And before we actually look at the accusation that was thrown at Jesus, I think we need to pause.

We need just to see what's happening there in that home in Capernaum. And I believe we're seeing this. Mission responding to mission.

[17:49] Here's Matthew acting in mission towards others as a result of Jesus' mission and saving sinners. mission following mission. And in your life as a Christian as part of, you might say, part of the DNA of a Christian, you are a missionary.

Or as Charles Spurgeon put it, he said, every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. And these are challenging, there are some harrowing words. Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.

That's a real challenge. It's a challenge to myself. I'm sure a challenge to yourself as well. In other words, am I just playing at being a Christian? Or am I truly serving the Lord Jesus and pointing others to my Saviour by my words, by my actions?

This morning, those of you who are here, we heard that report from Warwick Short on his work in Niger. Wonderful work amongst the Fulani people.

The work that God has given that Warwick and his family there in a very, very challenging part of the world. But Warwick, Warwick Short has been called, as Jim and Megan called to Benin.

[19:10] But, you know, there's a mission field here in West Lothian. It's for you who love the Lord Jesus to follow the Lord Jesus where he sends you.

Whether it be as missionaries here in West Lothian, whether it be wherever you are, whether it be here or in another country. And, you know, we're seeing that zeal, that missionary zeal here in Matthew.

There's Matthew as a missionary amongst fellow tax collectors, those whom the Pharisees considered outcasts, sinners. What do we notice?

Many follow Jesus. Many in the house. Notice how many times the word many is repeated there. The Gospel is reaching into the hearts of those whom others considered outcasts, rejects of society.

You know, it must have been some sight there in that house to see, you know, to witness Jesus, his disciples, many outcasts in Capernaum, there in that house and having that fellowship meal.

[20:13] Now, we're not told what the conversation was that took place in that house. What is clear is that Jesus was the invited guest amongst other invited guests.

There's Jesus present at the table and his company being enjoyed. He's not being shunned. Jesus isn't shunning the tax collectors, the tax collectors aren't shunning Jesus. But of course, for that company, the company that Jesus kept, there was opposition.

There always will be opposition when you're doing the work of the Lord. There will be opposition. You would almost say it's inevitable. And in that opposition, there's accusations you see there in verse 16.

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? Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

There's the accusation. Now, who's doing the accusing? Well, it's these members of this Pharisee group, this group within Judaism.

[21:22] They had very strict laws, as I'm sure you know, about whom they mixed with, who they act with. They were, of course, devoted, devoted to keeping the law of Moses.

But they even created their own additional laws to keep them from breaking the commandment. So, as well as the ten central commandments, the ten commandments, they produced a whole lot of other commandments around the ten commandments.

And they reckon that, in fact, the law contained, I'm told, I haven't read them, 613 commandments, 248 positive commandments, commandments, and, of course, 365 negative commands.

The Pharisees were determined to keep every single one of their laws to show that they were holy, that they were acceptable to God. So, a Pharisee's life was one of separation, separating from those who weren't part of their group.

They wouldn't buy food from anyone who wasn't of that group, and they certainly wouldn't go to any house that didn't belong to one of their group. They were trying to protect themselves from breaking or even indirectly breaking their laws.

[22 : 35] In fact, they were adding to the law, to the law of God. They were making obedience a work of righteousness. So, for Jesus, Jesus was considered a teacher of the law, the law of God, even though he wasn't a Pharisee.

So, for Jesus to eat with those whom the Pharisees despised, those outcasts and sinners, sinners beyond redemption, that was sufficient for Jesus to be questioned about his actions, or certainly in the first instance of the disciples, alas, what about him, what about Jesus?

So, the Pharisees are accusing Jesus of having standards that were totally at odds with what was expected of someone who was considered a teacher of God's word.

In other words, what do we see in the Pharisees? Legalism. That legalism that was so concerned with outward actions, but so devoid of the grace of the Lord Jesus in meeting the needs of those with whom he's eating.

Jesus offended their legalistic sensibilities, and he offended by his grace and his love, his grace and his love towards the outsider.

[23 : 47] Well, how does Jesus respond? He responds in a brilliant reply. He spoke of what truly mattered. He spoke of why he was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners.

See verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. And I think we can find three things here just to focus in as we come to a close in Jesus.

We might say showing forth his grace and avoiding that legalism that so hampers the work of a church. What do we notice first of all?

Well, notice that Jesus doesn't retaliate in anger. He doesn't hurl insults or abuse at the Pharisees for their questioning Jesus about his eating and drinking. But in the gentleness of his grace, Jesus responds with a truth that the Pharisees can't respond to.

They're silent when Jesus gives them that saying. And you know, that surely should help you. You who know the Lord as your saviour. When you come up against insults, whether it's insults within even the church itself or insults from others who are not of the church who are non-believers, well, what does think of Peter?

[25 : 13] Peter, remember, it was the source for Mark's gospel. You know what Peter said? First Peter 3, 9, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blame.

In fact, Peter in his first epistle would actually earlier write of Jesus. When Jesus was in trial, when insults were hurled at Jesus, when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. God will judge in God's time. For you and for me, when insults do come our way, for us to respond in grace and in love, because we're following Jesus.

And if we're following Jesus, we follow him on his terms. Of course, we've got to take stances and positions and positions, strong stances on things that dishonour the Lord. But in dealing with those who are hostile to your stance in God's word, you still show the grace and love of the Lord Jesus. But what else do we find in Jesus' reply here? Well, as we put it, he addressed misplaced zeal. I mean, the Pharisees were zealous. They were zealous in keeping the law.

[26 : 33] They did have a concern for the glory of God. They did have a concern for moral purity. They didn't want to offend God and they were zealous in their intentions. But it was all misplaced.

Because their legalism, their insistence on law as a means to please God and avoid God's wrath, that was misplaced.

Because why? Well, we can see that. They had no love for the lost. They had no zeal to love their neighbour. They had no heart for mission. They had no heart to welcome the lost and the outcast into the kingdom of God.

They just saw outcasts as permanent outcasts. And surely that's something that we need to continue to address in our relations with others. We want to be, I'm sure, you want to obey God's word and to keep God's word.

But we don't do it. At the expense of separating ourselves from the work of mission. You know, somehow avoiding those who aren't Christians. No, we ought to be the salt and the light of the world.

[27 : 43] Salt to have that impact in the world as preservative and as different to the world. Yes, to have that zeal, but not misplaced, but a zeal that truly honours God and shows love for others.

So Jesus showed that these Pharisees had a misplaced zeal. And following on from that, Jesus exposed false holiness.

You see, these Pharisees reckoned that they were righteous, the righteous ones. They reckoned because of their obedience to the law and all the associated purity laws that they'd earned their salvation.

They reckoned they were right with God because of their works, because of their separation from the outcast, because of their works of righteousness, because of their criticisms of others.

Jesus is showing that's false holiness. Jesus says he hasn't come to call the righteous, but sinners. These Pharisees reckoned they were the righteous ones.

[28 : 46] But Jesus is saying that he'd come, come to bring into the kingdom, the kingdom of God, not those who reckon themselves as righteous, righteous by their own efforts.

But Jesus has come to bring into the kingdom those who know that they're sinners, who know that they need to be made whole through the Lord Jesus. So Jesus would and will eat with sinners who know that they're sinners.

Jesus will reveal his love for sinners, to bring sinners into his kingdom. And surely there's an application salvation. For you desire to be like Christ, we are commanded to go into all the world.

We're commanded to come alongside those who need to hear the gospel, to be that, as we said, that salt and light of the world. So that means bringing the love of Jesus to our neighbors.

It means sharing the good news with many and using every opportunity that we're given to spread the gospel. people, we can't isolate ourselves from those who need to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus.

[29 : 56] We can't somehow parade a self-righteousness, which in fact is a false holiness. Surely, when you come alongside a non-believer, your motive must be to show forth the love of the Lord Jesus, to impact that life as salt, as light.

So let's loose ourselves from any false holiness, any misplaced zeal. But seek in God's strength to be like Jesus, to be like Him in His care and compassion for the lost.

And yes, to be fine with those who need to know the Lord Jesus as Savior. And may there be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.

May there be that rejoicing even this evening, whether it be here or elsewhere when one sinner comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. And may it be that God is glorified in your witness to show others the Lord Jesus.

And may there be rejoicing as I say, even in this building we may know that someone has come to know that great and blessed salvation found in Christ alone.

[31 : 13] Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, our God, our God, one another word.

Amen. Amen.