

Jesus Friend of Sinners

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0:00] Please be seated. So a few curveballs this morning.! I texted our speaker and asked him what time he'd be arriving here at church this morning.

! And he just said, uh-oh. I made a grievous error. He had put it in his calendar for next week. So guess what? Next week, we have the pleasure of hearing from Steve Janz, who's the president of Miller College of the Bible up in Shoe Swap. He was not able to get from Shoe Swap to here in time for 10 a.m., but that's okay.

So I have asked him that if he'd be okay if we brought tomatoes and cabbage, and we're going to hold him to a higher standard next week. My voice is, I'm feeling a little bit ripped off.

I'm worn out. I'm head cold, and I'm just, Pastor Crente was, I asked for some fisherman friends, and I've got about eight packs in my office ready for today.

[1:09] Yeah, we sprung ahead, right? I lost my hour. Extra rest. I was in bed by a little after nine. Got up a little bit later, expecting things to be a little bit smoother today, but this would have, this is as the Lord would have it.

So I spent some extra time. So I am preaching a sermon that I have preached a long, long time ago. It is a sermon that has been kind of sitting in my back pocket, and it has come out again because it's the sermon I'm going to be preaching in French in Quebec.

So I've just been working with the translations, trying to get it sound right. But as you heard from Pastor Dave, we were at Shepherds Conference.

And in case you're unfamiliar with that, that is a conference that has been going on since the late 80s. It started with a desire to equip and to encourage pastors.

I have been going off and on for over, I was just counting, I think it's 22 years. What's interesting, how I experienced it then is far different than how I experience now.

[2:22] Now, then you're with these men that God has used incredibly all over the world and the preaching, and you just couldn't wait to get to the next session and get the front seat and hear it.

And then you start to learn that, man, I can only take so much because the preaching is so good, it's so rich. And I kind of guess it's something like being on the carnivore diet where you're having a steak every meal.

You love steak, but after a while, it just starts to wear on you. This year was a bit unique because Pastor John's been called to heaven.

So they brought in different pastors that have been influenced by him to speak on the issues were of the greatest importance to him in ministry. And obviously, having been a graduate of the Master's Seminary, those are the most important issues to me as well.

So it's interesting, you go there to learn, you go there to be reminded of truths, you go there for a sense of fellowship, to grow and encourage. I was blessed with my son Jordan being able to come, and his simple comment was, my life has to change now.

[3:50] From what I hear, I have heard the scriptural truth, and I cannot ignore it. But for me, as time passed, the richness of my experience is connecting with old friends, people that I graduated with way back in 2007 and saw in 2006, 2005.

In fact, I had the pleasure of seeing my very first elder that was there from the church that I planted in Illinois. You know, I just see these old friends. In case you guys do not know, I attended the Master's College in 1987 and 1988, and I still see some of the old friends from there as well.

And what's interesting is that for a while, there was quite a few people would show up, and as time has gone on, some people don't show up anymore. We hear the whispers. Sometimes it's sin. Sometimes they've just dropped out of ministry, and some have even retired or graduated into heaven. But one of the most interesting dynamics, I don't know if that's the right term, is that some people drop out because ministry is hard. It's hard, and a lot of them go back just hoping to recapture a sense of that excitement that they had 20 years ago. It's very difficult in seminary to teach someone.

[5:28] Ministry is going to have hard, hard times. And some of them, you know, MacArthur, one of his biggest things is he calls us to be faithful. What's interesting is that sometimes men and women are faithful in really unhealthy circumstances. And they take their wives and children to churches, which should literally be shut down. They're filled with goats. They are not sheep. But when you're young, you do not recognize it, and you get these experiences of wounds. Some of my friends have made disastrous mistakes, leadership choices. Not out of sin, but just inexperienced. No one there to guide them through that process. In fact, I'm just going to... We're going to talk about a few of them because I want us to pray for him. I'm going to pray for George. George graduated with me, went to minister in Alberta, and it was tough. Church split. And it was so hectic on his family that he just took a secular job.

[6:38] Still serves as an elder, but there is unction and compunction within him to preach God's word. That has been built in. And he says, you know, this time really fires me up.

There were times when I went to seminary, some guys started off great. They had best-selling books, worldwide appeal, and now you don't hear from them anymore. Then there's this one guy, I think it's kind of funny. When he started, he was in youth ministry with me, and he got fired from youth ministry. Like, you got to be really bad to get fired from youth ministry, right? You didn't think, man, what is going to go on with this guy? He just had a hard time connecting with people. Well, right now, he's got probably one of the most influential ministries, and there's probably more pastors there than we have people in our church that are under him. God just takes these lumps of clay and molds them in the right time, in the right place. So like I said, it's time for learning, redirection, becoming more resolved.

[7:39] But here are some of the guys that really blew me away. And I'm changing some of their names because their names are not meant to be public. One is, let's just call him Jim. He's in Malaysia. He's doing well, but if you do not know Malaysia, you are free to evangelize. You're to someone that's a Muslim or a Hindu or whatever. But if they are a Malay, that is a punishable crime of prison, or you might not hear about that person again. That's intense. Another one, we'll call him Jimmy. He's in China. He literally lives in China running underground churches. His role is to train and equip the pastors there for the work of the ministry, and it has to be done in complete secrecy. They don't even tell you that he's even a part of the missions team at that church.

[8:42] So we'll pray for Jim. We'll pray for Jimmy. Then we'll pray for John. John's in Indonesia. And John just kind of started there. He had a few rough times, but apparently he's won the favor of the government and the leading religious entities, and he's now been asked to start preaching schools, expository preaching schools at 14 different seminaries around that nation.

Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. Then there's another friend. He sends people into Saudi Arabia. His goal in life is to break the back of Islam and the lies that are told there. And he has been doing this fruitfully, just propping up the underground church there.

And of course, there's some sad moments. It's my friend John, who I was able to reconnect in Philippines. When I saw him, he was 50 pounds lighter. Not only did he get cancer, but bacterial infection and almost died.

And just a joy to see him. I didn't know if I'd see him again. And then there's Fally. Fally's in Madagascar.

[10:01] He serves very faithfully in training churches. He gets a note from his wife that they have found a suicide note of their daughter in her bedroom.

Just three days prior, her best friend had killed himself. And they were mourning that and found out that their daughter was in on it. And was hoping to kill herself as well.

How do you process that? So I thought we would take some time just to pray. Where are some of these men and women and their families as they're battling overseas?

Sometimes even in their greatest fruit, they experience the greatest dangers. So let me just pray.

And if you'd pray with me. Dear Father, we just pray for your church.

Father, I love these guys who... I started out with seminary. I was just pretty excited, hoping to land in a really cool city. And their hope was to go to the hardest, rockiest places in the world.

[11:23] And you are sustaining them. You are building into them. Their families are flourishing. They are flourishing. You have brought a measure of blessing to them.

Father, I thank you for just even sustaining John's life. And he's got multiple kids that are still very young. You know, his heart's desire is to impart the truth of the gospel into their lives as much as possible.

You just never know. And with others, we pray for failure, Father, in the heartbrokenness. That will have repercussions. People will bring accusations.

You must have been a horrible father to do that. To make life so unbearable. You weren't picking up the cues. There's so much there. But, Father, I pray that you would shower that family with love and grace.

That that church would finally get to understand what is real and true. About what is so important about the ministry of Jesus Christ.

[12:34] Father, I ask that you would protect my brothers from the goats. May you bring other sheep dogs along with them to protect them.

I know I am blessed by elders and fellow pastors who protect me. Not just from criticism. But just watch my heart and my life as well.

And pray along through my challenges that I have, oh Lord. We all have them. Some of them are inside of us.

Some of them are outside of us. Some of them are outside of us. Some of them are outside of us.

So, Father, I give you thanks. And I pray that this day you would give an extra ounce of mercy to all these saints that are surrounding the world, proclaiming your gospel.

And I pray that they would know your loving embrace in everything that they do. We ask these things in your most holy and precious name. Amen.

[13:36] So, this morning, just thinking about these things, I wanted to answer the question of who does God really call?

Not talking about a pastor because that's one of the pressures that happens when you're at the shepherds conference. Do I really have to be a pastor to experience and grow from this?

And the answer is no. But the question I want to answer is who does God call to be his disciple?

Who does God call to be his disciple? Because the greatest thing in life is to be called a disciple of Jesus Christ. Who does God really call?

Who is welcome at his table? Who does he look at and say, you follow me? Thing is, we think we know, right?

[14:40] We think we know the type of people God calls. We assume God calls the clean, the committed, the competent. We think he's recruiting for team morality.

Right? Those are the people that God must want. And only those with a spiritual resume get through. But today, we're going to see something that I believe will blow some of those assumptions to pieces.

What's interesting in the Gospel of Mark, there are only two detailed stories where Jesus personally calls someone to follow him.

The first one is Peter, a good religious man. The other is Levi or Matthew, a man that everyone despised.

And we see in the Gospel text that God called both of them. And I believe the Gospel accounts is very purposeful in giving us these accounts.

[15:51] This is very purposeful. You see, Peter was the insider. He was the synagogue attending, festival keeping, Sabbath honoring Jew. If anyone was in line for the Messiah's inner circle, Peter would show up on that list.

However, Matthew was the outsider. He was a traitor, a thief, a religious disgrace. If anybody was disqualified, it was him.

And yet, we clearly read in the Gospels that Jesus calls them both. You see, because the call of Jesus isn't about religious reputation. The call to follow Jesus is called radical grace.

It is called radical grace. Now, let me put this even stronger. Jesus doesn't call the good people. Jesus calls the broken people. Jesus calls the ones who know that they are not good, but they are still ready to follow him. So this morning, we're stepping into the second of these two calling stories.

[17:09] And this is regarded as the scandalous one. The shocking one. The one that would make the religious world ask, Why would he call him?

So turn with me to Mark chapter 2, beginning in verse 13. And let's watch Jesus destroy every system of human religion with words.

Follow me. Now, before we dive in, it's important to remember what's going on in the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the fastest-paced gospel in the New Testament.

Mark wastes very little time, doesn't care about backgrounds. He gets right to the action. By the time we're in chapter 2, Jesus is already causing a stir within the land.

Pastor David's reading today talked about how everyone was coming and everyone was being healed. And he's preaching like no one they've ever heard.

[18:13] He's healing like no one they've ever seen. He's making paralytics walk. He's casting out demons. He's cleansing the unclean. And he is teaching with authority.

And the people are amazed. The religious leaders are uneasy. And the crowds are growing. But now Jesus is about to do something that just doesn't attract attention.

It triggers outrage. You see, it's one thing to heal a sick man. But it's another thing to forgive a sinner. But to call a traitor who is a tax collector into your inner circle, that's not just controversial. That's scandalous. And here's what I want you to see today. Jesus didn't come to affirm religious people. Jesus came to rescue ruined sinners.

And the only thing that qualifies you to follow Jesus is knowing that you're unqualified to follow Jesus.

[19:33] The only thing that qualifies you to follow Jesus is knowing that you're unqualified to follow Jesus. If you've been religious your whole life, you need to hear this.

If you've been running from the Lord, you need to hear this story. Because whether you're a Peter or a Matthew, Jesus is calling. So let's just look at verse 13.

Begins with Jesus has been preaching the kingdom. People are flocking to him. It says he went out, again, beside the sea and all the crowd was coming to him.

And he was teaching them. So Mark 2.13 opens with a familiar scene. Jesus is walking alongside the Sea of Galilee. And the crowds are coming over and over.

Why? Because they know he's been sent from God. By this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus isn't some hidden figure. He's not just some hidden backwater rabbi.

[20:32] He's now public, very public. And it's turned Capernaum, which is a part of Galilee, upside down. Word is spreading like wildfire. Where everyone, everyone who brings someone for healing gets healed.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us it's so complete that if you were to literally walk into a city, and if you went into a city with the gates, they would lay their sick down to ask for alms for the poor, for the sick.

They weren't there anymore. They're all gone. They're all working. They're all dancing. They've all been healed by the King of Kings. So by the time we get to Mark 2.13, everyone has heard the name of Jesus.

You would be unable to walk through Galilee without bumping into someone who's been healed, delivered, or transformed. Capernaum has become a living, breathing testimony to the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

So when he steps out to preach, the crowd follows. And notice what Mark says he's doing. He was teaching them. Notice the emphasis. It's not the healing. It's not the confronting. It's teaching.

[22:00] Because this is what Jesus never stops doing. And that is declaring the kingdom of God and calling for repentance. Here's the truth.

Miracles draw the crowd, but truth transforms the soul. You with me on that? The miracles draw the crowd, but it's the truth of the gospel that transforms the soul.

When people tell me they meet people who do these great miracles, whoopie-doo. That was solely to demonstrate that these men had the authority of God and the truth that they were preaching was indeed the word of God.

And it's into this context, a popular, visible, dynamic teaching moment, that something unexpected happens. Because if you're Jesus and you've got the momentum and the whole region is watching, what's your next move, right?

Do you rally the faithful? Do you double down on the message? Do you pick the rising religious stars and put them in the leadership pipeline? No.

[23:10] Not Jesus. Jesus doesn't call the next Pharisee intern. He doesn't praise the synagogue regulars.

He doesn't promote the ones who've been tracking with him. Instead, he turns to the man everyone else has given up on.

He looks across the road and sees a man sitting in a tax booth and calls him. You see, this is the gospel shock that's about to hit us.

Because Jesus isn't just building a following. He's building a family. And he's about to adopt the most unlikely candidate on the street.

So hear me. Jesus is not waiting for perfect people to gather around him. Jesus is walking right into the mess to call out sinners.

[24:12] Because if you think you're too far, too broken, too stained to be used by God, here's the good news.

You're exactly the person that Jesus is looking for. So that's what's going on. Let's turn to my second point. Verse 14.

The calling of Matthew, a scandalous outsider. And as he, Jesus, passed by, verse 14, he saw Levi. In case you do not know, Levi is the other word for Matthew, who penned the first gospel.

The son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, follow me. And he thought about it, pondered upon it, prayed upon it, talked to his family about it, and then followed him.

Not. Not. Just simply said, and he rose and followed him. Jesus is walking along.

[25:17] The crowd is leading in. The teaching is powerful. The atmosphere would have been electric. And then he stops, and he turns his eyes towards one man. A man not standing with the crowd.

He's a man who is not asking questions. He's a man that isn't even pretending to care. He's just a man sitting at a tax booth.

Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Like I said, this is Matthew. But at this point, he's not writing a gospel.

He's collecting taxes. He's pocketing the prophets.

He's the man every Jew in town despises. Now, I want to slow down for a moment because I want you to understand the weight of this moment.

Notice what it's listed here. He is a tax collector. Now, let me give you a little bit of history on what that means. In around the first century, which is when this timeline happens, the Roman Empire, taxation was a key mechanism for funding their military administration, their infrastructure, and the city of Rome itself.

[26:40] If Rome ruled your country, they don't care what happened as long as taxes came. You with me on that? That is what Kampire, if you weren't

paying your taxes, there's a legion of Romans coming to visit your city. All right? You need to pay your taxes. And the way it worked is Rome didn't himself enforce it. Wealthy people or corporations would come and say, hey, I want to bid on the territory of Palestine. And I'm going to bid 3 billion shekels because they all knew how much each territory was worth. Now, what the guy who's making this deal is hoping, he's not just hoping to get 3 million shekels. He's hoping to get four or five. Guess what? He only has to pay Rome the three and he can keep the two. You with me on that? That's how that whole system. So if he didn't pay off that three, guess whose life is doomed?

Right? Rome is going to get their money. So that's how it worked. Now, there was two type of taxes. There was the direct taxes, often on land, and poll head taxes.

[27:56] That's the type of tax that they would do a toll for. They want to know, or, thank you, census.

That's why Mary and Joseph was important for them to get the census because they wanted to know who was in the empire and how much money they could get. Because Rome was vicious. But then you have these other taxes, the customs, the duties.

This is the goods crossing over the borders, sales tax, tolls on roads and bridges and various markets. This is who Matthew was. He was at the lesser one.

So what would happen is the guy who would run the show would hand off these little tax franchises to other people. Capernaum, busy place. He gets this tax because if you're going up or down to Jerusalem, you've got to come through Capernaum.

So it's an easy place or opportunity. So think of him as a toll collector, the custom house official. He was the one who taxed goods on roads, harbors, carts, animals, anything moving in or out of the region.

[29:06] Now, Scripture actually says he is a maucous. I don't know how to pronounce it properly. But he was actually a little maucous. This means that he was the guy actually sitting in the booth doing the dirty work.

He wasn't just part of the system. He was the system. He was the constant reminder that Rome ruled you.

You with me on that? Because if he's there, that means Rome's still in control. And you hate the fact that Rome is in control. So his rule was to look you in the eye, size you up, and charge whatever he thought he could squeeze out of you.

You see, there wasn't any posted rates. There was no receipts. If he saw you coming with a full cart, he could decide on the spot to double your tax or not.

Whether he liked you or disliked your look. And he would just pocket the difference. So in a way, he's described as an extortionist.

[30:13] He's a traitor and thug. And he's got the protection of Rome behind him. And here's the thing. You don't take this job unless you're willing to sell your soul.

You don't take this job. So by the fact that Matthew taken this job means he's sold out on his heritage. He's sold out on his family. He ain't coming to Thanksgiving and Christmas meals anymore.

He's a pariah. Don't even mention your name. Drop your family name. Change it. Please, son. You're embarrassing us.

He sold out his people and ultimately, he sold out his God. So to the fellow Jew, he's a disgrace, a criminal. Like I said, a walk and reminder that Rome was in control.

And God had not yet delivered them. And this is the man that Jesus is calling. The text doesn't say that Jesus flinched or he paused.

[31:24] He doesn't wait for a sign of repentance. Jesus simply looks at him and says, follow me. Not even, hey, it'd be in your best interest to follow me.

Think about it. Come home and follow me. It's just simply follow me. There's no 12-step recovery plan.

There's no suggestion. This is a direct authoritative command. Leave that life. Get out of that chair and come with me now.

And here's the miracle. Matthew obeys. Immediately. Radically. The text just simply says, and he rose and followed him.

That's it. No questions. No objections. No delay. He gets up, walks away from power, from profit, from everything he's built.

[32:31] And here's the point. This is not spiritual reform. This is spiritual resurrection. When Jesus calls you, he does not ask for behavior modification.

Jesus demands your life. This is what grace looks like. Walks into the worst places, calls the worst people, and brings them out with just two words.

Follow me. Now, don't miss this. Matthew gave up more than any other of the fishermen.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John could go back to fishing if things didn't work out. Matthew is absolutely severing his life from the rest of his past.

There's no going back. Someone else would have bought that tax franchise by the time the day is ended. The door that Jesus offers him is a one-way door.

[33:46] And we simply read, Matthew walks through it without hesitation. Why, you might ask? Because the call of Christ is more power than anything Rome could ever offer.

Because the voice of the king was greater than the shame of his past. Because something inside of Matthew said, This is what I was made for. Here's the thing.

Jesus doesn't call us based on what we've done. Jesus calls us based on who he is. You with me? He does not call us because of us. He calls us based on who he is. And when he calls, you come no matter the cost.

Now notice what he does. Let's take a look at verse 15. This is Matthew's response. He's now called. He's following Jesus. What happens? Verse 15.

[34:53] And as he reclined at a table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus. So he's having a party. He's having a party.

Come, come. I want you to meet this man, Jesus. He's not just walking away from his old life. He throws a party to announce that he's leaving the old life.

In fact, Luke 5 fills in the picture more. It says, Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

Whoa. Do you see what's happening here? This isn't a pity party. This isn't a farewell tour. This is what one author calls, this is the feast of grace.

Matthew is publicly identifying with Jesus. He doesn't ease into discipleship. He doesn't hide behind quiet obedience.

[35:57] Matthew gets loud. Matthew goes public. He does the most unthinkable thing for a man with his reputation. He invites his friends to meet Jesus.

Let's be clear. These aren't his future networking friends. These aren't his investment buddies. This isn't a fundraiser.

This isn't a ministry mixer. The people who he invites are the outcasts of the outcasts. Tax collectors.

Prostitutes. Gamblers. Thieves. Roman sympathizers. And spiritual runaways. In French, I was looking at the French version.

If you're familiar with French, it calls them les méchants. Les méchants. The bad ones. These are the people nobody invited to the synagogue.

[37:04] And here, Jesus is reclining with them at the table. The only time you recline is when you're comfortable. Let that sink in.

Jesus is not standing in the corner, sipping something kosher. Hi. He's not making small talk with just his disciples.

He's in the middle reclining with sinners. That is the posture of comfort. Of welcome. Of a shared life. I'll be honest with you.

How many people get into that lazy boy at someone else's house and really flip up that seat and really lay down? You only do that at someone you really know, right? Someone you feel really comfortable with.

That's what Jesus is doing. He's on that lazy boy and he's just kicking back. Now, why does Matthew do this? You see, something radical just happened to him and he knows his friends need it too.

[38:13] You see, when grace really gets into your bones, you don't isolate yourself. You invite others. You don't say, look at me. You say, come meet him. Remember, the first apostle they really talk about, Andrew, he goes and gets his brothers.

He knows what Jesus is doing. Hey, you gotta see this. And notice he's not trying to clean them up. Hey, hey, hey, hey, honey. That top, a little bit too short.

Let's pull it up. Right, right? We don't want that. We don't want Jesus around there. Hey, hey, those nose rings, get rid of them, man. Clean it up. That really bad dye job you have on your hair, let's just cut it all off, right?

You know? I don't want you to embarrass me. He's not. He's not trying to clean them up. He's trying to invite them in. You see, Matthew knows that the same voice that pulled him out of darkness can rescue the rest of them too.

And so the man with the dirtiest reputation in town throws a party with the Holy One of Israel as his guest of honor. This is what grace does.

[39:25] Grace doesn't produce shame. Grace produces boldness. Grace doesn't whisper in back rooms. It shouts over dinner tables.

It doesn't create social clubs. It opens the door to sinners. sinners. I've gotten that a few times. Hey, I'm not aligned with you on your sexual ethics.

Can I come to your church? Absolutely. Let me ask you. Who sits around your table?

Are you still trying to follow Jesus in private? Are you still afraid of what the religious people might say if they knew who you used to be?

Who you still associate with? See, let me say this plainly. Saved people go find unsaved people.

[40:31] Period. If your version of Christianity keeps you insulated from the laws, you're following a different Jesus than the one in Mark 2.

And don't miss this detail in verse 15. It says, For there were many who followed him. What is he talking about?

The moral elite? The synagogue scholars? The religious professionals? No, it's the tax collectors. The sinners. The outsiders. The reprobates.

Those that were forgotten. Everyone else wrote off, Jesus, Jesus, or I'm sorry, everyone who everyone ever wrote off, Jesus welcomes in.

The people no one would touch, Jesus reclines and has dinner with. You see, this isn't Jesus tolerating sinners.

[41:37] This is Jesus pursuing sinners. In Matthew, he becomes the first evangelist to his own broken, sinful community. Doesn't wait till he's disciplined, or disciplined.

He doesn't wait till he's trained. It simply opens the door and points to Jesus. What about you?

When was the last time you invited someone over, perhaps asked someone from work to go have a lunch at a table, not to eat, but to share with them the news of the Savior?

Now, everything would be celebrated, but it doesn't. And so, as we move to the fourth point, the religious people are having a hard time handling this guest list.

Verse 16, and the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

They're basically saying, why isn't Jesus eating with me? You see, the banquet's in full swing. Jesus is reclining with sinners.

[42:49] Matthew is overjoyed. Outcasts are welcome, but not everyone is smiling. In fact, the religious leaders are fuming. They're not inside the house, because here's the truth.

They wouldn't even step in if they were invited. Why? Because that would make them unclean. But they're close enough to see what happens, close enough to feel disgusted, close enough to whisper their criticism.

In fact, they just pull aside a few of the disciples. Maybe it's Peter, James, or John, and ask the question that reveals the heart of every works righteousness system.

Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Why them? Why those people? Why would someone who claims to be holy associate with the filthy?

Now, don't misunderstand. This wasn't just a question of social etiquette. In the Jewish mindset, who you ate with said something about your identity. In this culture, table fellowship equals endorsement.

[44:02] You didn't eat with someone unless you accepted them. You didn't recline at a table unless you were saying, I'm with you. And to the Pharisees on this day, this was intolerable.

Because they had built their entire religious identity on separation. Don't touch the unclean. Don't associate with the impure. Don't eat with sinners.

Don't fellowship with the broken. You see, their understanding of holiness was avoidance. And now, Jesus is blowing their whole system apart.

And he hasn't compromised his holiness. Jesus is redefining what it looks like. That holiness is not avoiding sinners. It's moving towards them in mercy.

You see, holiness is not separation for the sake of purity. It's proximity for the sake of transformation. I can tell you right now, you can isolate yourself on a nice little island and form your great, the best Christian community ever.

[45:09] And if everyone passed that test, who's reached for Christ? No one. It's like you're almost sitting there. Lord, we want to reach you. please send a shipwreck over to our island, right?

Get off the island! But this was something that the Pharisees couldn't comprehend. They studied the law.

They memorized the scriptures. They had built fences around the commandments to ensure they wouldn't break them. And yet, the very Messiah they claimed to be waiting for was dining with the people that they despised.

Think about that. They had been waiting centuries for Jesus to come and here he is dining with the people that aren't them.

Do you get the weight of that? We should have been the ones that were invited to dinner with Jesus. And we learn through this that grace offends religious pride.

[46:14] See, let me make this plain. legalism is not just a theology. It's a wall. And it's a wall that keeps people out.

It's a wall built on man-made righteousness maintained by judgment and enforced by fear. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

because I used to be one of the wall builders. And Jesus walks right through it like it doesn't even exist. So here's the truth.

If the gospel, your gospel has no room for messy people, you're not preaching the gospel or living the gospel of Jesus Christ. If your holiness depends on distance from sinners instead of presence with them, you're more Pharisee than follower.

And if you're more concerned about who's at the table than who is at the center of the table, you've missed the entire point of the gospel. Let me say it straight.

[47:24] If grace doesn't offend you even a little, it means you probably don't understand it. The Pharisees couldn't believe Jesus was at the table.

That's exactly the point. Because Jesus didn't come to create a cleaner club of religious people. He came to call sinners home.

Let's look at verse 17. Here we learn that Jesus didn't come to applaud the clean. He came to heal the sick. 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 come not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Let's be honest, Jesus hears the rumbling. He steps in and delivers a verbal hammer blow to the religious pride. Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

in one sentence, he dismantles their entire legalistic mindset. The Pharisees see themselves as well, as clean, as righteous. We don't need correction.

[48:47] But Jesus says, if you think you're healthy, I'm not here for you. You see, Jesus isn't saying the Pharisees were actually righteous.

righteous. He's saying they think they are, and because of that, they will never come to him. If you don't believe you're sick, who goes to a doctor?

Right? If you don't believe you're lost, why would you search for a savior? If you don't believe you're a sinner, why would you search for someone who can forgive your sins?

But what about the tax collectors? The prostitutes? The addicts? The spiritually shattered?

If you have done any work with people who are addicted, shame is a big part of their life. Because they know they're sinners.

[49:49] They know they're sick. And when Jesus walks into the life and says, I've come for you, they fall at his feet. Let me say it clearly.

Jesus never came to congratulate the clean. He came to cure the condemned. This is why Matthew got up from his booth. That's why his house was full.

That's why grace is a scandal. Because it actually saves the people that you and I would never pick, and it just doesn't save them.

It transforms them. This, my friends, is the scandal of grace. This is the line in the sand.

This, as many state, is the offense of the cross. Grace doesn't say, clean up and come. Grace says, come and I'll make you clean. Let me ask you today, are you sitting here thinking you're righteous or are you at the table knowing you're sick?

[50:55] Because one of those people are going to walk away empty, the other will walk away forgiven. Now, let me leave you with something remarkable about Matthew.

the man sitting in that tax collector had another name, which was Levi. And this name matters because Levi was the name of the tribe God set apart for priests.

These were the tribe responsible for the temple. This is the tribe responsible for teaching the law of God. In other words, what I'm saying is Matthew likely grew up in a deeply religious home.

deeply religious. He would have known the scriptures, he would have learned the law, he would have been trained in the traditions of Israel. The fact is Matthew was raised to be the religious of the religious.

But somewhere along the way he saw something. He saw the hypocrisy, he saw the corruption, he saw that this religious system that promised righteousness was spiritually bankrupt.

[52:10] So what did he do? He walked away and he left religion. But he went to the world. He sat down at the tax booth, he worked for Rome, he made money, he gained power.

The world that had promised everything had obviously left him empty. and Matthew understands more than anyone else that religion can't save you and the world can't satisfy you.

And then one day Jesus walks by. Jesus doesn't see a disgrace, he doesn't see a traitor, he doesn't see a wasted life.

He saw a sinner who needed grace. And he said two words that changed everything. Follow me. And Matthew got up, he left religion, he left the world, and he found a truth and home in Jesus Christ.

And friends, this is the story of countless people sitting in churches today. Some of you have tried religion. Some of you were born into religion.

[53:30] You followed the rules. You tried to be good enough. You tried to prove yourself. But deep down you discovered something honest. This religion isn't working.

It's not saving me. Others of you have tried the world. You've gone the road of money, success, pleasure, freedom, and autonomy, and you discovered something else.

the world can't satisfy you. But the good news of the gospel is this. Jesus still walks past tax booths, and he still walks past broken lives.

He still walks past people everyone else has written off, and he still says the same words. Follow me. Not clean yourself up, not fix your past, not prove your worth.

He simply says, follow me. The Pharisees never came. They thought they were well, but Matthew came, because Matthew knew he was sick.

[54:44] The moment he followed Jesus, the traitor became a disciple. The outcast became an apostle. The tax collector became the man who would write the gospel that tells the world Jesus is king.

So here's my question this morning. Are you the Pharisee, convinced you're fine, or are you Matthew, ready to get up?

Because if Jesus is calling you today, don't stay in the booth. Get up and follow Jesus. Dear, most holy, precious Lord, we thank you for your kindness of these simple stories in the gospel that transmit so much truth.

Father, I pray for those that have either poured themselves into religion or this world. I pray that you would reveal the foolishness of those things. And Father, I also ask you to erase the lies that Satan obviously says over and over again.

You're too dirty to be cleaned up. You're too messy to be saved. For those of you who invested in religion, Satan's going to tell you you're fine where you're sitting.

[56:10] You're okay. Look at what you're doing. Look at you do your devotions every day. You come to church regularly.

But you know in your heart of hearts you're condemning others because they're not like you. That's the legalist. So Father, I ask that this truth would wash over us and would propel us to a deeper and kinder understanding of Jesus so that we can share this with those that are lost rather than keeping these simple truths to ourselves.

We ask you these things in your most holy, wonderful, and precious name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.