

# What Jesus Didn't Come to Do

## Galilean Ministry Part 10

Mark 2:13-17 (Mt.9:9-13, Lk.5:27-32) 1/20/2018

Summary: Confrontation #2, Jesus calls a hated tax collector to follow him, then dined with all his repentant, low-life friends. The Scribes confront the disciples on it, but Jesus answers and uses their own reasoning to show that they are the ones who are excluded, since the Messiah is a doctor for the unrighteous. Self-righteousness excludes you because it prevents you from repenting. Jesus made Matthew a great man.

What Jesus Didn't Come to Do.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Review .....	2
Teaching.....	2
The Calling of Levi.....	2
Darth Matthew .....	2
The Evil of Tax Collectors .....	3
The Encounter.....	3
Jesus Rules ... Hearts.....	4
Lost Cause?.....	4
Matthew's Response .....	4
Bad P.R. ....	4
The Dinner.....	5
Sinners .....	5
Followers.....	5
Reclining.....	6
The Challenge.....	6
Jesus' Response .....	7
Doctors Are for Sick People .....	7
Only Sinners.....	8
You're Not Too Far Gone .....	8
Self-Righteousness.....	8
1) Religious Observance .....	8
2) Resolutions.....	9
3) Victimization .....	9
4) Good Deeds.....	9
5) Comparison .....	9
6) Self-Loathing .....	9
Called to Repentance .....	10
Where Are You in the Story?.....	10
Are You Self-Righteous? .....	10
Judgmentalism.....	10
Are you Like Jesus.....	11
Conclusion .....	11
The Rest of the Story .....	11
Potential .....	11
Story of Michelangelo's David .....	11

**Mark 2:13** 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.”

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## Introduction

### Review

We left off last time with Jesus standing there with hole his roof. Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins, the Scribes accuse him of blasphemy, and Jesus blows them out of the water with one question: Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat, and walk’.”? “Your sins are forgiven” is the easier claim to make, because it can’t be disproved. But really, neither one is very easy to say, because claiming to have authority to forgive sins can get you put to death for blasphemy. It’s like Jesus is saying, “Which one would you guys rather say?” “Uh, yeah, how about neither?” And Jesus says, “How about I say both? And I’ll prove the first one is valid by this: Then he looks at the guy on the ground and says, “Get up, take your mat, and go home.” Imagine if the guy didn’t get up. Jesus leaves himself nowhere to hide. He isn’t like Moses, who hedged his bets by striking the rock – just in case it didn’t work, he wouldn’t look like a fool. Jesus doesn’t do that. He said, “All my authority depends on whether this works...” and then tells the lame man to walk, and he walks.

That was conflict #1 out of the five in this section. Jesus provoked them by claiming the authority to forgive sin. Now in conflict #2 he’s going to provoke them again.

### Teaching

**Mark 2:13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him**

Once again Jesus does a big miracle, attracts a crowd, then withdraws. But the crowds follow him, and so he does what he always does.

**13 ...A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus was always teaching and preaching.

## The Calling of Levi

### Darth Matthew

**14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth.**

Now, if this were a movie, everything would get real dark and ominous, threatening, menacing music would start playing at this point. Mark introduces a dangerous villain– like when Darth Vader first appears in Star Wars. That’s how this would have come across.

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<sup>1</sup> The grammar indicates that the crowds were coming, and Jesus was teaching, so the idea is successive groups of crowds. A crowd comes, he teaches, another crowd comes, he teaches again, etc. This is one of 27 times when Mark mentions that Jesus was teaching or he’s called a teacher. Not to mention all the times he preaches. That was Jesus’ primary focus – teaching and preaching the gospel.

We tend to think of the Scribes and Pharisees as the villains. But in that culture, the Scribes and Pharisees would be the characters in the story that you would most expect to be the heroes. But a tax collector – that’s someone everyone would see immediately as evil incarnate.

## **The Evil of Tax Collectors<sup>2</sup>**

Tax collectors had virtually no regulation, so they could pretty much charge you whatever they wanted. And they got rich by extracting every dollar they could from you. So instead of thinking of Levi as an IRS agent, think more like a gang member collecting protection money. And if you complain, he could double it. There was no appeal process.

And that’s not even the worst part. The worst part was that Matthew was a Jew. He’s working for the oppressors of Israel, helping them. Like a Jew in the concentration camps working for the Nazi’s. So when Levi took this job he became an absolute outcast. He couldn’t testify in court, he was excommunicated from the synagogue –all his family members were disgraced. All ancient writers considered tax collectors among the most immoral people in society. And within Judaism, both the liberal wing and the conservative wing, which never agreed on anything, agreed on this – that it was righteous to lie to a tax collector. That’s in the Mishna. Tax collectors were listed in the Talmud with the unclean beasts of the OT.

They also taught that if a tax collector ever truly repented, he would immediately die. So if he claims to repent and doesn’t die, you know he’s lying.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Encounter**

So Levi was immoral, dishonest, hated, and probably a pretty rough character. If people refused to pay, he would need to enforce his taxes. And he had to defend against the Zealots, who would kill any Jew who sided with Rome in any way. So, no doubt he was a rough guy surrounded by some serious muscle and weapons - ultimately backed by the Roman Empire. Levi is not someone you want to mess with.

Jesus is going to mess with him. We just saw Jesus’ confront the religious authorities, now he confronts government authority.

### **14 ... he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth.**

What’s going to happen?

Now remember, in everybody’s mind, the job description of the Messiah is to come and defeat Israel’s enemies and bring military dominance to Israel. And if you’re going to resist the controlling power, the place to start is with the tax man. That’s how the Jews finally did rebel against Rome 40 years later.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There were different kinds of taxes, just like today. And most of them weren’t too bad, but there was one that was especially bad – the customs tax. It was like a toll or a duty. The customs offices were on trade routes, and they would tax travel and commerce. It’s not surprising that there would be one near the lake, because they taxed the sale of fish (In two inscriptions from Magnesia and Ephesus reference is made to “those who are concerned with the toll on fish.”) and the Sea of Galilee was where almost all the fish for the whole region came from.

<sup>3</sup> Edersheim: Rabbinic teaching about...repentance...it is expressly and repeatedly declared in the case of certain sins...that, even if a man genuinely and truly repented, he must expect immediately to die, indeed, his death would be the evidence that his repentance was genuine, since, though such a sinner might turn from his evil, it would be impossible for him, if he lived, to lay hold on the good, and to do it. [e Ab. Zar. 17 a.]

<sup>4</sup> The Jews started the rebellion in 66 AD by refusing to pay taxes to Rome, and were subsequently destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

## Jesus Rules ... Hearts

Jesus has been calling himself the Daniel 7 Son of Man, who will be served by all nations. Is that going to start now? Is the heading on this section of the gospel going to be “Jesus Rules Empires”?<sup>5</sup>

Well, Jesus walks right up to this big, tough, scary man with all his guards and weapons, looks him right in the eye, and gives him an order. “**Follow me**” (then motions behind him).

## Lost Cause?

*Nobody* saw that coming. Jesus doesn't go after Levi's power; he goes after Levi's heart. He calls Levi to be one of his permanent followers.

What a waste of time that seems like. You really think a guy like Levi is going to be interested in the life of a disciple? Do you realize, Jesus, that you are calling this man away from everything that has ever excited him in life? And to give up his livelihood, in such a way that he could never return to it? Do you really think this guy is going to be interested?

We all hate the Pharisees because they condemn people like Levi by looking down on them. But how often do we condemn people, not by looking down on them, but just by deciding ahead of time that they probably won't be interested, so we don't bother sharing the gospel with them? “He's not going to be interested,” so we don't even tell them. And we miss all the Levi's out there. We forget that Jesus calls guys like Levi the same way he called Lazarus out of the tomb. It doesn't matter how dead the corpse is – the power come from Christ.

You see what Jesus is doing in these last three events? The leper – that shows Jesus' willingness to cleanse the unclean. The paralytic – that showed his authority to forgive sins. Now he calls Matthew, to show the extent - just how far this forgiveness thing goes.<sup>6</sup>

## Matthew's Response

So what is Matthew going to do? At that moment the Bible says this big, rough, mean, intimidating oppressor came to his feet. **14 ... and Levi got up.** Maybe the thugs who worked for him for enforcement stepped forward toward Jesus as well.

### 14 ... Levi got up and followed him.

And in Luke's account it says

### Luke 5:28 Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Jesus rules hearts. All conversations stop, and the only thing you hear is the sound of Matthew's sandals as he walks toward Jesus.

## Bad P.R.

This is the worst PR move Jesus could have possibly made. 150 years after this Celsus mocked the Christians because he said their Master made “infamous men, customs officers and sailors most wicked” his pupils.

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<sup>5</sup> There are people who teach that Jesus was all about what they call “social justice.” They call their doctrine Liberation Theology, and they saw when the Bible talks about salvation, it's talking not about spiritual deliverance from sin or judgment, but rather political deliverance from poverty and injustice. It's not spiritual salvation; it's political salvation. And the preachers of Liberation Theology would tell oppressed people to rise up and revolt against the government that is oppressing them.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew, Mark, and Luke frequently place events in different order, but all three gospels place these same three together in this same order.

And not just a pupil. We know from the parallel passage that Levi was the Apostle Matthew. He had two names. Jesus not only associates with this guy; he calls him to be one of the Twelve Apostles!

I can tell you for a fact that in most churches today, the Apostle Matthew, who wrote the book of Matthew, would never be able to get hired as a pastor because of the way they interpret the “good reputation” requirement in 1 Tim.3. We can’t have someone like him be the face of our church – representing us in the community, because that would bring reproach on the name of Christ. It would be a black eye.” But that’s a black eye Jesus goes out of his way to get.

## The Dinner

And he doesn’t stop there. As usual, Jesus does something shocking, and people say, “That’s as outrageous as it can be!” And Jesus says, “No it’s not. I can get way more outrageous than that. Here, watch this...” and he proceeds to ratchet it up times ten. 15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house Whoa – dinner? He’s eating with this guy? Sharing a meal with someone is an act of closeness. That’s why your wife is upset if she sees you in a restaurant with another woman. And who you eat with says something about who you are. That’s why it mattered so much in Jr. High which table you sat at during lunch. Eating with someone means intimacy, friendship, identification and association with the person. And much more so in that culture than in ours.

So Jesus eats with wretched villain, Darth Matthew. And if that’s not enough, let’s ratchet it up even more.

**15 ... many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples**

## Sinners

Matthew invited all his low life friends over to his house for a big party with Jesus. Matthew sets a great example for us - thousands of churches have been started that way.

The term **sinners** refers to people who were especially immoral in the eyes of society.<sup>7</sup> And tax collectors were people who got rich by taking advantage of others in immoral ways. It’s like you go into the dinner, there’s Jesus enjoying a nice, medium-rare lamb chop, and laughing with the lady next to him who was head of Planned Parenthood. She got rich by abortions, and then selling the body parts of the babies. And the sinners - there’s a child molester, sitting right across from the guy who was convicted of raping 5 women. A crack head, an ex-con. The organizers of the gay pride parade. And there’s... – fill in the name of whatever politician you despise most.

## Followers

Now, aside from the question of why Jesus would eat with those people is the question of why those people would want to eat with Jesus. Of all the Bible writers, Jesus was the one most prone to warn people about going to hell. No one was harsher in condemning sin. Why would the head of Planned Parent want to spend an evening with someone who talks about murderers going to hell? The only kind of murderers who would be interested in having a meal with Jesus would be repentant murderers. And repentant rapists and drunks and all the rest.

**15 ... many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.**

**Many tax collectors and sinners ... many who followed him.** It’s the same **many** both times. These people at the meals were just like Matthew, they had become Jesus followers. They had repented.

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<sup>7</sup> Some commentators argue that the term merely refers to “the people of the land,” who were not strict observers of the traditions of the elders. But if that were the case, it would be no surprise that Jesus ate with them, because he was one of them.

I don't know how many times I've heard people use this passage to say that Jesus "hung out" in bars, as if he's throwing back a few beers and yucking it up with the guys to win their friendship. No. He didn't hang out – he preached. He preached repentance<sup>8</sup>, and judgment, and people who didn't repent did not want to hang around him.

## Reclining

But these people repented, and then they all gathered for a big party with Jesus. The terminology here refers to a big, formal banquet, not just a regular meal.<sup>9</sup> This is a preview of the great Messianic Banquet at the end of the age. And the banquet is one of the most beautiful pictures of Christ's love for us – that he wants to have a major party with us and eat and drink with us in a great celebration. He's not ashamed to eat with us and to even call us his brothers and sisters.

## The Challenge

**16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees<sup>10</sup> saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"**

In the first encounter, Jesus had to read their thoughts. This time they do speak up, but not to Jesus. He's too intimidating. They corner the disciples.

So the meal is over.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is still inside talking some of the people. A couple of the disciples step outside – now's their chance! They can handle these fishermen. So they confront them. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

The disciples are speechless. Peter probably disagreed with this whole dinner in the first place. Peter was as kosher as they come. Years later in Acts 10 he gets into an argument with God about eating with Gentiles. And Peter also struggled with cowardice in situations like this. So I can see Peter sweating bullets here, not knowing what to say.

So you've got these disciples with their backs up against a wall, some of the most powerful men in the country accosting them like a bunch of bullies surrounding some little kids. And then suddenly comes this strong, authoritative voice from behind them.

**17 ... It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.**

I bet they jumped out of their skin. They whirl around and there they are being stared down by the unflinching authority of the King of Kings. They went from being in charge to being in trouble. But at

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<sup>8</sup> The call to repentance is very consistent throughout the NT. It's an essential part of the gospel. You see it in the preaching of John the Baptist (Mt.3:1 = Mk.1:4, Lk.3:3, Lk.3:8-11, Acts 13:24), Jesus (Mt.4:17=Mk.1:15, Lk.13:3, Mt.11:20, 12:41, Lk.24:47, and six times in the letters to the churches in Rev.2,3), the Disciples (Mk.6:12, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:13-19, and Paul (Mk.6:12, 20:21, 26:18-20, 2 Cor.7:10). Repentance is not a human work that merits salvation, but is a gift of God's grace (Acts 5:31,11:18, 2 Tim.2:25).

<sup>9</sup> The normal way for Jews to eat a meal would be at a table, with chairs. The Romans had a practice of reclining, where the table would be low, and they would lie on their side, lean on an elbow, feet away from the table, and eat that way. The Jews adopted that in cases where there was some especially big, fancy banquet. The word throughout this passage is the word for *reclining*, so this is a big event.

<sup>10</sup> We've already heard about the Scribes, but this is the first mention of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were initially a good movement. They formed to call people back to faithfulness to the Word of God. Jesus had much more in common with them than with the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the liberals, who didn't even believe in the supernatural. When there is a conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus sides with the Pharisees.

But the Pharisee movement made the fatal error of accumulating human traditions, and elevating those to the level of God's Word – much like the Roman Catholic church does with church tradition. And from there, their focus went from heart issues to external things – ritualism and ceremonialism.

There were about 6000 Pharisees in Israel at this time. And the scholars within the Pharisee sect were called the Scribes of the Pharisees. Other sects had their Scribes, but these Scribes were from the Pharisee camp.

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees never would have come inside that house.

least it doesn't last long. Over and over we see Jesus destroy these guys with a single sentence or question. This one must have seemed like it went on forever because it was two sentences. You know, I would love to see Jesus go on Bill Maher or one of those shows where they stack the deck against some conservative and then tear them to ribbons.

But it wouldn't make great TV because if it were anything like Jesus' encounters with the smartest men of his day, it would only go on for a sentence or two and Maher and the rest would be completely silenced, because Jesus' responses were completely unpredictable, they stripped his opponents bare in front of everyone, exposing their stupidity and evil, they thoroughly stumped everyone (no one ever answers any of Jesus' questions), and they instantly put an end to the argument.

## Jesus' Response

### Doctors Are for Sick People

That's what this answer does. They say nothing. What could they say? Jesus takes an obvious, well-known saying and exposes everything that's wrong with their way of thinking.

The Scribes probably thought they were ready for this debate. They expect the disciples to try to give some kind of answer, "Well, those people weren't as bad as you think. If you knew their story, they're not so bad..." And the Scribes would be ready to demolish that argument. They probably had specific, documented details about each the people they saw there that would be irrefutable, and they were all ready to prove that these people were a bunch of sickos.

But the debate doesn't go the way they expect. Jesus uses their own perception of these people to show the folly of their attitude.

#### 17 ... It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

You're accusing me of being around a lot of sickos? *I'm a doctor*, Einstein. Who else am I going to be with?

Then he says the same thing again without the metaphor.

#### 17 ... I have not come<sup>12</sup> to call the righteous, but sinners.

So in the metaphor, the sinners were the ones in the banquet; who were the healthy righteous people that Jesus didn't come for? The Scribes. Jesus gives them an answer they can't possibly argue with. They can't object and say, "What? We're not righteous and healthy. How dare you call us that!"

Everything Jesus said was exactly what they believed. But do you see what Jesus did? He used their own reasoning to paint them into a spot where they are the ones excluded. Every Scribe knew that Isaiah 61 was a description of the Messiah.

**Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners**

So if you aren't poor or broken or enslaved by darkness, then guess what – the Messiah is not for you.

You're excluded, and the sinners are included.

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<sup>12</sup> Once again Jesus speaks in ways that wouldn't make sense for a normal person. Instead of saying "I was born for this..." he talks about having come into this world from heaven.

## **Only Sinners**

Most people have no problem with the idea that Jesus came for sinners, but what they don't realize is that Jesus came *only* for sinners – no one else.

He doesn't say, "I came to call both the righteous and sinners."

He specifically says **I have not come to call the righteous.**

Jesus came to this world to cure the problem of unrighteousness.

If you don't have that problem, he has nothing to offer you.

If you're not a vile sinner, you're on your own.

## **You're Not Too Far Gone**

That's why it's so ridiculous when people say, "I'm too far gone to come to Christ.

I've done too much evil."

Being too evil is what makes you qualified.

If you weren't too evil, you wouldn't even need Jesus.

Sometimes people don't come to church on Sunday because they had such a bad week of sinning.

Or you don't want to pray right now because you just fell into some really bad sin, and you don't feel worthy to speak to God.

We think that way because we forget – Jesus is a doctor.

If someone says, "You should really go to the doctor and get that cough checked out," you don't say, "Well, I would like to, but I can't go to the doctor now."

"Why not?"

"Because I've been sick all week."

"I don't feel like I can go to the emergency room, because both my arms are broken, and I'm still bleeding pretty bad.

I see people coming out of the ER and they had these nice casts and slings and bandages and they're all patched up.

But I'm not patched up at all, so I don't think I should go."

So much of our spiritual stupidity would be erased if we just remembered that Jesus is a doctor.

## **Self-Righteousness**

Ok, so was it really true that the Scribes were righteous?

They had a form of righteousness.

**Matthew 5:20 ... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and Scribes, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Their righteousness couldn't save them.

Why? Because it was self-righteousness.

Self-righteousness is when you come up with a way to make yourself think you're good enough.

It's when you're righteous, not in God's sight, but in your sight.

And there are several varieties of self-righteousness.

### **1) Religious Observance**

The Pharisees did it through strict religious observance.

No one was stricter in following the traditions and rules and ceremonies than they were.

They put their confidence in that.



## 2) Resolutions

Another tactic people have is to convince themselves they are good enough based on all their resolutions and plans for how they are going to do so much better in the future.

“Just wait – you’ll see, I’m not that bad.”

## 3) Victimization

Others go the victim route.

I’m good enough because, if you take into consideration what I’ve been through – my upbringing, abuse, hardships, chemical imbalances – considering all the strikes I have against me, I’m doing pretty darn good.

## 4) Good Deeds

For others, it’s their good deeds.

They think every good deed they do blots out some bad deed.

So they just think through all the good deeds they have done, and it’s overwhelming.

Of course they are ok with God.

## 5) Comparison

For others, it’s by comparisons.

“At least I’ve never done *that*.”

“I’m not as bad as *him*.”

We grade our righteousness on a curve, and somehow we always end up at least a little higher than average.

Did you know that something like 90% of people consider themselves above average?

One thing about self-righteousness – it can only survive by tearing down those people who make you look bad.

Those people are the greatest threat to you feeling good about yourself, so you have to find a way to bring them down a few notches – either by assuming some bad motive in their good deeds, or by finding fault in them in other areas.

“Maybe he seems good in this area, but in this other area he’s blowing it, so he’s not that great.”

Isn’t it funny how our good deeds cancel out our bad deeds, but other people’s bad deeds cancel out their good deeds?

## 6) Self-Loathing

One of the trickiest forms of self-righteousness is self-loathing. People can’t figure out any way to be good enough, so they just beat themselves up for not being good enough. And that’s what they put their confidence in – the fact that they beat themselves up over their sin. The fact that I’m so hard on myself for being bad – that makes me kind of good.

There is no end to the variety of forms of self-righteousness. But every one of them disqualify you from grace because Jesus did not come for the righteous. If you come up with a way to make yourself good enough, then you are like the Pharisee in Luke 18.

**Luke 18:10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: `God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give**

**a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.**

We watch the news, or listen to the gossip chain, and we are so horrified by other people's sins, but what sin are they doing that is worse than our self-righteousness? In the words of J.C. Ryle, overt sin has destroyed its thousands, but self-righteousness its tens of thousands.

## **Called to Repentance**

The reason self-righteous people are disqualified from spiritual healing from Jesus is because they will never do the one thing that's required to receive grace: repentance.

There's another difference between Jesus' first statement and the second. The first statement (about the sick and the healthy) is about what people need. The second statement (about the righteous and sinners) is about what Jesus came to do.

**17 ...I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**

Call them to what? To repentance. That's implied<sup>13</sup> here, but it's explicit in the parallel passage in **Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.** You can't call a self-righteous person to repentance, because if you're righteous, what do you have to repent of? If you're good enough, what is there to be broken and crushed over? But the overtly immoral people don't have any excuses, so it's much easier to get them to realize the depth of their sin. That's why it's so important for pastors to preach about sin and God's law. Because no one goes to the righteousness doctor until he realizes he is deathly ill.

## **Where Are You in the Story?**

### **Are You Self-Righteous?**

So where are we in this? Are we the self-righteous Scribes? When we see some hard case like Matthew, why are we so reluctant to share the gospel with them? And why are we so surprised when they respond? It's because we mistakenly think we are different. "That guy will never listen to the gospel." Why not? You did? "Well yeah, but I'm not like him." Really? What kind of sinner were you – a righteous one? We sing of his "amazing grace that saved a wretch like me," but what about that wretch that's not like me? Do I assume he's beyond grace?

### **Judgmentalism**

Jesus exposes the Scribes as "doctors" who go around making diagnoses, but who refuse to ever treat a patient. "You're sick, you're sick, you're sick, you're really sick." Part of our sinful nature is a motor we have inside us that drives us to constantly diagnose people's spiritual sicknesses. And then we do what these Scribes did. Instead of going to that person with a cure, we talk to other people about the diagnosis. "Hey, have you ever noticed how she always does this...?" "He's always so selfish." "She's so full of herself." "He thinks he's better than everyone." "I can't stand her because she's such a gossip."

It's like we have a built-in radar system that runs 24/7 that is always scanning for the failures and weaknesses and faults of the people around us. That radar machine has a name – it's called self-righteousness, and it is a very serious matter. Because Jesus didn't come into this world to call people like that, because they don't repent. I can't be truly broken over my sin while I'm scanning for yours.

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<sup>13</sup> Mark has already told us that the call to repentance was the heart of Jesus' message (Mk.1:15).

## Are you Like Jesus

Are you a Scribe? Or are you like Jesus – happily welcoming the worst of sinners when they repent? What could be more ridiculous than a church that shuns sinners? Sinners are our bread and butter. That’s our entire customer base. To shun them would be like a restaurant owner putting up a sign saying, “No hungry people allowed. We don’t serve your kind here.” Or a car mechanic that has a sign, “No junkers.”

Was it last week we were talking about how the world has two categories of sins: the acceptable ones (like complaining or materialism or pride) and the scandalous ones (like child molestation or something that would send you to prison)? That’s how the world thinks, but in Scripture the two categories are repentant and unrepentant. God rejoices over a repentant murderer, and he’s furious at an unrepentant gossip. I hammered that point for 10 years at Agape, and yet even after 10 years, we got someone who committed a scandalous sin and repented, but when it got into the media and the general public became aware of it, how many stood by the repentant sinner? Ten years of lip service about being restorative and welcoming tax collectors and sinners with open arms, then we get one scandalous sin, complete repentance, and almost everyone runs for the hills. People harbor bitter anger toward Bob, and at the same time imagine that they would somehow welcome the Apostle Matthew.

**Romans 12:16 ... be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.**

What would get you more excited – if next week three new families joined your church – middle class, healthy, clean cut, good, stable income? Or an ex-convict, a couple lesbians, an addict, a pervert, and a drunk? Are we in the business of sinners or not? Are we in the market for spiritually sick people or not? Jesus is, and he has no problem whatsoever being associated with any repentant sinner.

## Conclusion

How far does this forgiveness go? All the way to the bottom - to the worst of sinners.

## The Rest of the Story

Can I close with a little Paul Harvey “Rest of the Story”? What happened with Matthew? Is he kind of a second-class Christian? Matthew will sit on one of 12 thrones in heaven and rule God’s people forever. God chose him to write the Gospel of Matthew – front and center in the Bible. God picked this piece of garbage to write the greatest work on the majesty of the kingliness of Christ that has ever been written. This man who had been banned from the synagogue – ends up being a Bible expert (Matthew has more OT quotations in his book than Mark, Luke, and John combined). Christ took the most worthless refuse of human society and made him one of the most famous, respected men ever to live. To this day we name our children after him. We name our dogs after Caesar.

## Potential

Jesus looked at this scum at the bottom of the societal barrel and saw potential. He saw potential, but not in Matthew. Matthew didn’t have any potential. Jesus looked at Matthew and saw potential in Jesus. He saw the potential of transforming grace.

## Story of Michelangelo’s David

In the late 1400s, the great sculptor Donatello was going to embark on a project of sculpting one of the Old Testament prophets. They brought a giant marble block from the quarries of Carrara into the city of Florence. Donatello inspected it and immediately refused the project, because of flaws in the block. So for some time the stone just sat there in the cathedral yard. But one day another sculptor was looking at that block and, as he examined it, an image of great beauty rose up in his mind, and he resolved to sculpt it. For 2 years that artists worked feverishly on the project, even sleeping in his clothes. Finally, on

January 25, 1504, all the greatest artists of the day assembled to see what he had made of the rejected block. All the big names were there – Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, and Pietro Perugino, who was the master who instructed Rafael. As the veil dropped to the floor, the statue is met with a chorus of praise and applause. And now, centuries later, Michelangelo’s David is still considered one of the greatest works of art the world has ever known.

The potential is not in the stone – flawed or not. The potential is in the artist.

If you ever find you’re having trouble loving someone because of their horrible flaws, or you see someone, or some class of people as being worthless – whether it be a homeless drug addict, or a criminal, or an ethnic group or political party, or just someone who has hurt you really bad, just remind yourself: *That person is like Matthew – and me – a flawed piece of marble.* And grace has potential.