

# Jesus with the Publicans and Sinners

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Mark Series

By Rev. Andrew Lanning

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## **First Reformed Protestant Church**

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Before we pray, there is one announcement. Mr. Kuypers' condition has not improved the past couple of days. He has required more oxygen support and is quite weak. He has also been experiencing pain due to clots in his lungs. He has been moved to the ICU so that the doctors can determine a plan regarding possible intubation. We remember our brother and his family before God's throne of grace.

Let us call upon the name of our God and prayer.

*Our Father, which art in heaven, we call upon thee as the great Jehovah and as our Father for Jesus' sake, and we call upon thee in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, thine only begotten Son, whom hast sent for our comfort and peace, whom thou hast given for our salvation, and whom thou hast given as thy covenant with us, whom thou hast given as thine elect and as our head in whom we have life and salvation and everlasting joy. We call upon thee, Father, in this morning to hear us while we pray, and while now in trouble's day we seek thy face. And truly, Father, this is a day of trouble as we have heard regarding our brother and the trouble of his pain, the trouble of his deteriorating health, and the trouble of possible intubation, and the misery of the sickness of this earthly life. And we see in our brother's affliction the affliction that faces all of us as creatures of the dust, that our earthly life is fleeting, that our years of strength and robust health are few, and that as the grass flourishes for a while, but soon withers and fades, so we find in our earthly sojourn that our strength is only for a time and then our strength fades and withers. Father, in this day of trouble for our brother and his family, we call upon thee and beseech thee that thou will hear us indeed, and in the midst of pain and suffering, in the midst of our dying, whether that dying is soon or a long way off for us, in the midst of all of our suffering and pain and dying we pray, Father, that we may have joy and happiness and patience, the joy and happiness and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our life and whose life has been given to us in such a way that we shall never die. Never die. And even though our body is destroyed and after our flesh worms destroy this body, that even then, we never die for our life is secure in Christ with thee we have the everlasting life and salvation of our Savior himself. We pray, Father, that thou wilt comfort us with this knowledge of our Lord and comfort us with the truth that our Lord has stood at the portal of death himself and willingly crossed the threshold of death, gave his spirit into thy hands and entered into his own grave, and by that entered into all of our graves and has gone right through death and the grave into*

*heaven on the strength of his own merits and on the rightness of his own righteousness, and that all who are in him have his righteousness and may stand at the portal of death and cross its threshold without fear knowing that we tread the path of life that our Savior has made for us by his own death and righteousness into glory.*

*We pray, Father, that thou wilt remember all of our sick and afflicted. We remember before thee also Gabe and his family. We thank thee that they were able to return from the hospital. We pray that thou will give to the doctor's understanding of the cause of his recent affliction and seizures, we pray that thou will use the additional medication for his health according to thy will. I pray, Father, that thou will cover us with thy feathers, that under thy wings we may trust that thy truth may be our shield and buckler against all of the fears and the doubts and the temptations that our sicknesses and the sickness of our loved ones bring. Thou art our God. To thee we pray and seek thy face in the day of trouble. Will thou hear us and answer us in thy mercy, for thou only art divine and to answer Lord is thine, and most bright, thy glories shine, O God of grace.*

*I pray, Father, that thou will remember those in the congregation whose loneliness and pain and suffering and infirmities and troubles and afflictions and sorrows and weakness is not known to the congregation, but is known to thee. Will thou look upon us in thy mercy and cause the light of thy countenance to shine upon us so that in our suffering and pain when we look up to thee, we see not the face of wrath turned against us to consume us, though this is what we deserve, but that we may behold thy face in its beaming rays of love and mercy and everlasting good pleasure to save thy beloved, to save us in Jesus Christ. Comfort us who are comfortless. Strengthen us who are powerless. And draw us nearer to thee who are lonely and afar off. Have mercy upon us, Father. We thank you that we may hear thy word this day here in thy house. We pray, Father, that thou will cause that word to open our prison of guilt and sin and that the gospel may set us free, that we may be released from all our iniquity. May we hear our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. who is finally all that we have.*

*We pray, Father, that thou will be with thy servant as he proclaims that word. Sanctify his lips that his own will and voice and all of his things may be gone., nay not enter in, but that thy word and thy word alone is spoken to us. Prepare our hearts to hear that word at the Gospel of Jesus Christ may encourage us and send us home happy.*

*We pray, Father, that thou wilt continue to remember our office-bearers and their labors, be with our elders, strengthening them for their calling. We thank thee for them, for the good gift to the church that the office-bearers are. I pray that thou wilt give to the office-bearers thy word that they may bring that word to us, that they may apply it to us in our many needs for our instruction, for our comfort, for our warning, for our admonition, for our joy. We pray that thou wilt sustain the elders in their rule, the deacons in their administering the mercies of Christ. We pray that thou wilt remember our congregation also in the matter of office-bearer nominations. We thank thee, Father, that thou has led us through this process thus far, would thou continue to be with those men now who consider the nomination that they have received, that thou will give to them the knowledge of whether to stand for that nomination and continue to open the door for us*

*to elect elders and deacons according to thy will and counsel for the good and care of this flock.*

*We pray that thou wilt remember the saints in northwest Iowa. We thank thee for the decision of the Classis in this past week approving their organization in the upcoming months. Wilt thou be with our congregation and our council and be with the saints in northwest Iowa as we make arrangements for that organization. I pray, Father, that thou wilt be with the men who confess their faith next week, wilt thou give unto them boldness to stand before thy face and the face of men in the church and to declare thy truth. I pray that thou wilt remember the saints in Cornerstone. We thank thee for the decision of the Classis granting their request to be members of our federation and denomination. Will thou bless them and their worship this day. Wilt thou encourage them and strengthen them in their calling and their worship. We thank thee, Father, for the means that thou hast given us that each in our own place being assembled, we may worship thee together.*

*We pray that thou wilt remember others of thy people in other parts of the country and the world who also worship with us this morning, who make use of the means of technology and who gather in their own place and who do so with no knowledge of what the future may bring, not even the morrow, but who have the confidence that thou art good and faithful to thy people, to the church, and that there is no thing in all of the earth like thy truth, that thy truth is above all. We pray that thou will comfort and encourage them and build thy church in those places too.*

*Father, forgive our sins, the sins of us publicans and sinners, and whores and iniquitous people. Forgive us all our iniquities. We acknowledge before thee our sin and transgression. Wilt thou not count our sins but account to us the righteousness of Christ and all his atonement and all his holy works, and assure us and comfort us by thy gospel of our forgiveness and righteousness in him. And keep us from sin that we may hate and flee from all our iniquity, and that we may more and more by the gospel of Jesus Christ, loved thee and love our neighbor. Hear our prayer. We call upon thee and to thee belongs the answer, and so answer us in mercy for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

We worship the Lord now in the giving of our offerings. The first offering is for the general fund and the second is for benevolence.

Psalter #142, "God be merciful to me." Four stanzas, all four of 142.

"God, be merciful to me,  
On Thy grace I rest my plea;  
Plenteous in compassion Thou,  
Blot out my transgression now;  
Wash me, make me pure within,  
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin,  
Wash me, make me pure within,  
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

I am evil born in sin;  
Thou desired truth within.  
Thou alone my Savior art,  
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;  
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,  
Wash me whiter than the snow,  
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,  
Wash me whiter than the snow.

Gracious God, my heart renew,  
Make my spirit right and true;  
Cast me not away from Thee,  
Let Thy Spirit dwell in me;  
Thy salvation's joy impart,  
Steadfast make my willing heart,  
Thy salvation's joy impart,  
Steadfast make my willing heart.

Sinners then shall learn from me  
And return, O God, to Thee;  
Savior, all my guilt remove,  
And my tongue shall sing Thy love;  
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,  
And my mouth shall praise accord,  
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,  
And my mouth shall praise accord."

We turn in God's word this morning to Mark 2, Mark 2. We begin our reading at verse 13 and read through the end of the chapter. Mark 2 beginning at verse 13.

13 And he [that is, Jesus] went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. 15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? 17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. 18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? 19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 But the days will

come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. 21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. 22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles. 23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. 24 And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? 25 And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? 26 How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? 27 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: 28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

This is God's word, holy and inspired. May he bless it to our hearts this morning.

Our text is verses 13 through 17.

13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. 15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? 17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, this text before us this morning is a hard word to hear, a hard reality that is taught by the Lord about you and about me but a very good word to hear, a very comforting word. What makes this word so hard is that this word says something about us that is not only very, very unflattering but that is downright offensive to our flesh. A word that we hate to hear. There has been a lot of talk these days about whores and who is a whore and who is not a whore, and what would you think if this word of God said to you, you're a whore? That's what this word is. You're a publican. You're a sinner. With all that can be classed in that category of sinner, that's you. This word isn't talking about your institution, your church, this word is talking about you and about me. That word of God calls us to acknowledge what we are spiritually by nature, publicans and sinners, and that makes this word very hard to hear, it offends us naturally. But that's also what makes this word very good for us to hear and necessary

and comforting for us to hear, because we, being what we are by nature, our only hope is in the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, those who are not whores do not need Jesus. They don't need him. Those who are not publicans and sinners have no use for a Savior who came to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous. When the word of God identifies us according to our spiritual character by nature, then it shows us that our only hope is outside of us and not at all in us, but outside of us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there's hope for you, there's hope for me, there's the gospel for you and for me, the good news of salvation in this Jesus who came to sit with publicans and sinners, who came to sit with you and with me, publicans and sinners, and to eat with us in our own homes and in our own church. That's the mercy and the grace of this Lord Jesus Christ which is the mercy and grace of Jehovah God to us, and in that mercy and grace of our Lord is all our hope. What a beautiful gospel, what a beautiful word, and though it must kill us, and though it must pierce us through and destroy our flesh, what a beautiful word of the gospel that sets before us the Lord Jesus Christ and his mercy and grace among the publicans and sinners.

And so let us consider this word this morning under the theme: Jesus among the publicans and sinners. In the first place, consider the fact; in the second place, consider the affront; and in the third place, consider the reason. Jesus among the publicans and sinners: the fact, the affront, and the reason.

The text opens with the Lord Jesus Christ teaching by the seaside. Again, verse 13, "Jesus went forth again by the seaside; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them." This characterizes the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. This characterized his whole earthly ministry. Every time we turn around, we find the Lord Jesus Christ teaching again and that teaching he continues to do today so that everything written in this book is for your teaching and for your instruction and for mine so that we understand who this Jesus is, and we understand why he came, and we understand for whom he came, and that's the teaching of the Lord here as well in this passage. He teaches us today who we are and why he came and how he saves us from our sins.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught by the seaside and as he walked by and passed by, he saw a man named Levi, the son of Alphaeus, who is known elsewhere in the scriptures as Matthew, he saw this Matthew or this Levi, the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom. The receipt of custom was one of those places throughout the land where the publicans would sit in order to charge the taxes and receive the tax money from the people on behalf of the Roman government, and the receipt of custom was a wretched, wretched place. The receipt of custom was not a place that any decent people went to. The receipt of custom was not where any decent people would spend their time or would hang around. If someone is sitting at the receipt of custom, then he's a publican as Levi or Matthew was. And a publican was known and famous throughout all the land for his thievery, for being a thieving, stealing degenerate. That was a publican in those days. The people hated the publicans. When the publicans would collect the tax money, they would often skim a little extra for themselves and the people knew it, and the publicans knew it

and the government knew it, everybody knew it but nobody would stop it. The people were powerless and so hated, hated these publicans.

Well, there sits Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the receipt of custom, and Jesus says to Matthew or to Levi, "Follow me," And immediately Levi stood up and left the receipt of custom and followed the Lord Jesus Christ. Levi said to the Lord, "Come to my house. I want to have a meal with you. And there are others that I know of, other publicans and other sinners, who must hear you also." Verse 15, "it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house," in his house, there is Levi's house, Matthew's house who made a great feast unto Jesus, and to all of these other publicans and sinners with whom Levi was associated, many "publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many and they followed him."

Now we know the class of one kind of sinner who was at that house, publicans. There were many publicans there, many men who had stolen from the people. Many thieves who were there in that house. And the other class of people who were there were sinners and that description of this class of people as sinners means to cover all the other notorious kinds of sinners that were present in Canaan. This would include those who were murderers, violent men, men who, if they were caught by the state, would be executed by crucifixion if they were Jews by the state. Murderers were there. Drunkards who were given to wine. Harlots, whores, who were well-known throughout the land a being harlots. All these sinners were there with Levi in Levi's house eating with Jesus and his disciples.

We read at the end of verse 15, "there were many," of these publicans and sinners, "and they followed him." These publicans and sinners represent the spiritual condition of man. They represent man in his nature. They represent man according to what he is by his birth, according to what he is by his fall in Adam. These publicans and sinners represent the depravity of mankind. These publicans and sinners did not represent good people. They did not represent decent people that one normally would want to be associated with in those days. These represented all of the wickedness and all of the sin that belongs to mankind. They were publicans and they were sinners. These publicans and sinners therefore represent you and represent me. These publicans and sinners were publicans and sinners, and they knew it and everybody knew it. And what about you? What about me? Are you a thief? Are you a drunk? Are you given to fornication and adultery as a harlot and a whore? Are you a murderer? These publicans and sinners were and these publicans and sinners knew it, and when that question is put to you, what about you, are you these things? Then the answer is, "Yes, that's what I am by my nature. That's what I am according to my fall in Adam. Those are the sins to which I am tempted and into which I fall. Yes, I must say about myself, I am a publican and a sinner. Yes, I am a thief and a murderer and an adulterer and a harlot. Yes. I am these things by nature. That describes me. That's my spiritual character."

That's the spiritual nature of mankind. All of the Pharisees and scribes were characterized by this as well. All those decent, upstanding Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin and all the rulers of the people, they were characterized by these things too. In

many ways, they were probably characterized by these things more than the publicans and sinners were though they had a decent veneer and covering for it. But the Pharisees didn't know that they were publicans and sinners, that's the difference between the publicans here and the Pharisees and the scribes. The publicans and sinners knew it. They knew what they were. They knew they were publicans and sinners. That's why they follow Jesus. They knew they were sick. They knew there was something dreadfully wrong with them. They knew their own depravity. They knew the sins to which they were tempted, the sins to which they had been given. And they followed Jesus. The word of God here, then, exposes us as being by nature publicans and sinners who walk contrary to the law of God, and who by nature are degenerate and disgusting in our sin. It's not flattering. That's downright offensive to the flesh but that's the word regarding publicans and sinners, the word that we must confess as well.

And yet we find the Lord Jesus Christ among them, with them. The Lord, having taught all of the people by the seaside, passed by the custom house, passed by the house of the receipt of custom, passed by that den of thieves that was the publican's office. The Lord Jesus Christ went there and called to one of the publicans, "Follow me," and that publican left that house of the receipt of custom and followed Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ went to Levi's house and sat down at his table where a meal was laid out and had fellowship with that publican, Levi, and where there were many other publicans and sinners assembled, and shared a meal with them, and by that had fellowship with them and communion with them. The Lord Jesus Christ associated with these publicans and sinners and fellowshiped with these publicans and sinners.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as always, fellowshiped with publicans and sinners, that's whose house he goes to. That's with whom he has communion and fellowship. That was true of the Lord Jesus Christ as he hung upon the cross. He was with publicans and sinners upon the cross. Off to one side of him was a murderer; one of the thieves hanging on the cross was a thief and a murderer, a notorious sinner being executed by the Roman government for his crimes of thievery and murder. And Jesus was with him in his death and there with him, associating with him, fellowshiping with him by his word, and by his Spirit, speaking to that thief words of comfort today. "Verily, I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise."

There is Jesus at the cross associating with publicans and sinners, and not only with that one thief and murderer, but associating at the cross with all his people for when the Lord Jesus Christ hung up on the cross, he took to himself all of the publicanism, all of the thievery and murder of his people, all of their adultery, all of their hatred. He took all of that upon himself and hung up on the cross with all of their sins counted as his own and taken by himself as his own, so that he hung there as a publican and a sinner. He hung there that way, though he himself personally was innocent and had not committed a single sin all his life. God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin. The Lord Jesus Christ came for publicans and sinners and associated with them even upon the cross, associated with us, even upon the cross.

Isaiah 53:9, "he made his grave with the wicked," he made his grave with the wicked. He entered into the grave of the wicked, your grave and my grave, because God had made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, and he went to break the power of that sin and break the power of that grave by his atoning death.

The Lord Jesus Christ came associating with publicans and with sinners and with you and with me. He comes to your house, the Lord does by his word and by his Spirit, he brings you into his own fellowship and his own communion so that you hear the word of Christ to you as a word of mercy and love. He comes to your church and speaks to you the Holy Gospel. You publicans, you sinners, me publican and me sinner, he speaks the word to us and gives us his Spirit by which Spirit and word he abides with us and associates with us, and has communion and fellowship with us so that you leave that word of God saying, "We have seen Jesus Christ. We have been with the Lord this day." The Lord Jesus Christ associates with publicans and sinners.

The Lord Jesus Christ associates with publicans and sinners to save them from it, to save them from all their iniquity, from all their depravity, from all their guilt and all their sin. That's the fellowship that publicans and sinners need. They know they're sick. They know there's something wrong with them and must have the forgiveness and covering of their sin in the blood of Christ and the breaking of that power of their sin over them. Publicans and sinners, the Lord comes to emancipate and to set free from all their sin.

That's what he did to Levi, that publican sitting in his custom house. He said to Levi, "Follow me. Follow me." And when Jesus said, "Follow me," he had a reference to his own cross and his own death to cover all the sins of that publican, Levi, because the path of the Lord is the path of atonement. It is the path of justification. It is the path of the Lord's own making, and the Lord's own doing as he went to the cross and covered all the sins of Levi in his own precious blood, and obeyed all the laws against stealing for Levi, and in Levi's place, so that Levi stood before Jehovah God as perfectly righteous with all the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ came to fellowship with those publicans and sinners in Levi's house, then he fellowshiped with them as the one who had delivered them from all of their sins. That's what their following him refers to. It refers to that faith that these publicans and sinners had in the Lord Jesus Christ, which faith says about themselves, "I have nothing but this Lord Jesus Christ alone is my righteousness, and alone is my salvation."

Jesus said to the Pharisees when they questioned him later, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." The Lord Jesus Christ came to save and deliver his publicans and Pharisees, or his publicans and sinners rather, from all of their sin and all of their iniquity. And that's the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for you too, and for me too. He comes to call us to repentance, to call us to faith in himself, to call us to salvation in him and in him alone, so that you who know the dreadful sin of your own nature and you know the dreadfulness and grossness of your own falls, have hope and comfort and peace in this Savior who has delivered you.

Jesus by associating with these publicans and sinners and saving them from all their sin, demonstrates and shows the great grace of God to his people and that's what stands out in this passage, the grace of God for sinners. The grace of God is his favor for his people which favor his people do not deserve but which favor God sets up on them according to his own eternal good pleasure in Jesus Christ, and according to which favor he saves and delivers his people from all of their sin and comes near to them in his mercy and makes his miserable people happy with the true joy of salvation. That's the grace of God, the favor that he has for his people. Do you know the depth of that favor? Can you see how marvelous that favor is? That's favor for you whores, publicans, murderers, thieves.

If you would see a whole congregation of murdering, thieving, fornicating, drunken degenerates, what would your attitude towards them be? You and I would screw up our faces in a sneer of disgust. We would say, "That's no place for decent people there." That's what our attitude would be. What's the Lord's attitude towards this assembly of publicans and sinners? He doesn't sneer at you. He doesn't sneer. He beams at you. His attitude towards you is favorable. He loves you and in that love covers all your your sin and your iniquity, and in that love has sent his only begotten Son who never was a publican or a sinner, never was, but who was made to be one, that is, who was counted as one and accounted as one with all our iniquity. God took all your wretchedness, all your wretched sins and you and I would sneer at and he put all those sins on Christ. And then, having covered all our sins, he sends the word of Jesus Christ to teach you and to say to you, all your publicans and sinners, "I have come for you. I've come for you. I have come to redeem you. I have come to save you from your dread disease, from your dread death of sin and misery. I have come for you because I love you and always have from all eternity."

That's grace. That's the grace that is revealed here in this passage, and that grace of God does not come and set itself upon decent people who are worthy of it. That's not at all why God favors his church. His favor is for publicans and sinners whom he redeems from their sin. That's illustrated in Jesus' call of Levi or Matthew in the text. As Jesus passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, "Follow me." And he arose and followed him. There's a publican, there's one of the most hated men in Jewish society. When people would see Matthew, they would turn up their lip in a sneer at him, "There sits Matthew. Matthew's in the house of the receipt of custom." Matthew's in that place that no decent person would hang out in. Matthew is not looking for Jesus. Matthew is not trying to find the Lord. Matthew is a publican. The Lord finds him. The Lord comes to him and sees him and sees him not in the way that a thousand other eyes that day had happened to land upon Matthew and see him, but the Lord sees Matthew as one who's looking for him, as one who is seeking him out. He sees Levi and he says to Levi, "Follow me." And by that powerful word of his gospel, that word that sets before Levi Jesus Christ, "Me," says Jesus to Levi so that Levi see with the eye of faith created by that word this Lord in all his glory, and sees his need of this Lord and this need that the Lord be with him and be with him in his house. Matthew sees all of that by the faith that the Lord gives him by that call and Levi leaves all and follows the Lord Jesus Christ. That's grace. That's unmerited unearned grace. That's grace that has nothing to do with what's in Levi, which was only sin and disgusting iniquity. That's

grace that caused Levi only because of what's in the heart of the Lord which is grace and mercy and salvation.

And that's your call and mine as well. The Lord Jesus Christ sets himself before his people, shows them who he is as the Savior and calls unto them, "You who are lost in your sin, you follow me. You follow me who am the Savior and whose blood covers your iniquity, and who has given you a place in heaven, a place that is reserved for you. You follow me." And that's the truth, that characterizes the people of God all through their life. We never get to the point where we say, "Now I'm not a publican anymore. Now I'm not a sinner anymore. Now I'm not a harlot anymore." The confession of the child of God all through his life is, "That's my spiritual nature, that's what characterizes me according to my fall in Adam. Those are the sins that I fall into and to which I am prone. All my life, I need this Jesus. I need this Savior. I need the grace of God." There never comes a point where I become a decent person in the sense of having no more need for that Savior. If I am to live to the glory of the Lord, then I need him at every moment, at every moment of my life.

When the Pharisees saw this, they were offended. The Lord's eating with the Pharisees, the publicans and the sinners rather, was a great affront to the Pharisees. Verse 16, "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" That question of the Pharisees was not a curious question. It wasn't the Pharisees and scribes trying to understand what's going on here because they love Jesus and want to know what he's doing. The scribes and the Pharisees were offended by Jesus eating with the publicans and sinners, and that's evident from Jesus' response to them, "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And Jesus there reveals that the question of the Pharisees was an offended question because when the Pharisees saw Jesus eat with the publicans and sinners and not with them, then they felt in that a rebuke of themselves. They felt in that that Jesus was saying something to them and so they asked the disciples, "Why doth he eat with publicans and sinners?" Their lip was curled, their head they shook at what the Lord was doing.

And the Pharisees and scribes were offended at Jesus eating with publicans and sinners because the Pharisees were healthy and sound and whole and righteous in themselves. The Pharisees and the scribes had no need of Jesus. Well, that's fine that he's there for a while but they did not need him. Jesus himself says so, "They have no need of a physician. They have no need of a physician." If someone had come to a Pharisee and said, "You're a publican," he would have said, "No, I'm not! I'm not a publican!" Or if someone had accused a Pharisee or a harlot, he would have said, "Me? How dare you? Me? I'm no harlot!" That characterizes Pharisees and scribes, they're not publicans, they're not sinners and have no need of the physician. They have no need of the gospel of that physician that comes to them and accuses them of what they are and points them to the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope. That's chilling. That's chilling because it's offensive to your flesh and mine too, when someone says, "You're a publican and a sinner."

But the publicans and sinners alone, the sick with sin, have need of this physician. We can go deeper still, the reason that the Pharisees and scribes have no need of the physician is because they have a different God than Jehovah. Jehovah is a God of grace. Jehovah is a God who saves sinners in his grace. The Pharisees and scribes don't have that kind of God. The Pharisees and the scribes have a God who pays them what is due to them. The Pharisees and scribes were not very big sinners, they didn't do that many things wrong. At the end of the day, they could probably count on one hand how many things they did wrong that day. And there were probably many days when they had been very, very good people, very, very good, and God owed them something for that. They were healthy. They were healthy, they were not sick. They were righteous. They were not unrighteous, they were righteous and somebody ought to recognize that once. Somebody ought to tell them how good they did once. Somebody ought to pay them something, their praise, their honor or whatever else it maybe once.

The God that they stood before in their hearts was a God who was indebted to them for their righteousness. That's not Jehovah. That's not God. God is a God of grace. God is a God of mercy who is indebted to no man. God is a God of mercy and grace who saves his people by the blood of his only begotten Son, and who comes to those who only deserve a sneer and damnation with it, and he beams on them, loves them, gathers them to himself in Jesus Christ. God is a God of grace. The righteous man, the healthy man has a different God than the God of the scriptures and the God who is Jehovah. The righteous man, the healthy man has no need of the physician. Only by the grace of God is our sin iniquity revealed to us. Only by the grace of God are we exposed as publicans and sinners to know ourselves for what we are. Only by the grace of God do we hear the gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ came to call such as you to himself in repentance and in faith. He came to call such as you, such as publicans and sinners in his everlasting mercy.

Jesus in this passage reveals also the reason why he came, to be with the publicans and the sinners. They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus here points his people, as he's speaking to the Pharisees and the scribes, but he points his people to his coming. "I came. I came to do something. I came with a specific task. I came with a specific purpose and work to do, and my coming was not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And when Jesus calls attention to his coming and to the task of his coming, he is pointing us into the eternal counsel of God and his eternal purpose with Jesus Christ and his eternal purpose with sinners, with the unrighteous, with publicans and with sinners. The eternal purpose of God is behind the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation of the publicans and sinners from their sin. Jesus came as the one who would accomplish that calling of the sinners. Jesus came according to the eternal decree and good pleasure of God to save his people from their sins.

When Jesus says, "I came to do this work," he is showing you what is in the heart of God for you as a sinner and a publican. He is showing you God's eternal good pleasure to save you from your sin. And when Jesus points to that eternal counsel by saying, "I came to do this work and not another work," then you publicans and sinners and me may be very

happy indeed because that eternal purpose and good pleasure of God cannot be overthrown. It is the good pleasure and counsel of God and it is the good pleasure and counsel of God in his grace to call sinners to repentance, to call unto you, your emptiness and mine, and to call until you the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ and all his righteousness. Then you may go home knowing that you;re a publican and a sinner by nature, knowing the battle lies before you, you may go home with all of that happy and joyful and confident of the mercy of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This word is a hard word to hear for the church because it pierces us with our own natural spiritual character, but this word is the gospel for this word emptying you of yourself, fills you with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Our Father which art in heaven, this word to us this morning, bless it to our hearts. We pray, Father, that thou will give to us Jesus Christ and all his riches and salvation for we are publicans and sinners and we depend upon thy grace, thy everlasting mercy and thy internal counsel and our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save his church. Hear our prayer, forgive all our sins, and apply thy word to our hearts for Jesus' sake.*