

**Questionable Company**  
**Mark 2:13-17**

It truly is a privilege to gather as we do, on a week by week basis, and be able to sing these songs and do it together, come together as brothers and sisters in Christ, thanking God for saving us, as we all share that in common at the core of who we are as the body of Christ. So, wonderful luxury we have, especially in a country that allows this and is okay with it, and we get to gather. We get to do this freely and enjoy it. Obviously, other parts of the world that's not the case. They don't have that opportunity, and even if they do, it's often done in fear or just knowing that any moment their physical danger and life could be on the line. For us, we enjoy this comfort of coming together as believers, but we're still aware that there are plenty of unbelievers in our society. Even as nice as we have it, as comfortable as it is to come together, to be brothers and sisters in Christ, to have these moments, to be in growth groups together, to do ministry together, we're still very aware that the world is upon us. It is rampant actually.

Jesus, when He prayed to His Father, He did not ask that we would be taken out of the world, but that we'd be protected from the evil one. So, it's an expectation that we would be in the world; that is, we're still around, every day, people that don't believe in Christ or people that have not heard about Christ. They're at our work places. They're where our kids are going to school, and the families that we run into. They're at the classes that we're taking, the people we run into. They're in our family, they're our friends even that we've had for a long time. They're all around us. So, we get this time together as believers, and we know what to do. We enjoy coming together. We enjoy turning our attention to Christ and His word and what we can learn and how we can move forward and conduct ourselves. But we must ask on the other side, how do we conduct ourselves around these unbelievers? How do we approach them? How are we to go about our lives as we interact with the world regularly. Many Christians have undertaken this process and adopted different philosophies of going about it. I'll give you a couple that are wrong and not good.

One, you know, one kind of brand of Christian says stay far away from the world. You see those that don't believe, you see those that don't share your conviction or they don't, really, want your religion, and those people are kind of the enemy. You want to stay far away from them. Shelter yourself

from them. Don't come close. And they even tout different, you know, Christian principles such as bad company corrupts good morals; therefore, I'm not going to let me nor my family interact with any of the unbelievers that are out there. That's on one end of the spectrum, to be as separate as possible from the world, and that's wrong. That's not good. On the other hand, you have the opposite; some Christians that dive right in, and they eat it up, and they swallow it, and they realize this is great. This is what we should be doing, around unbelievers all the time, all day, every day. I mean, this is what Jesus did. Right? And they think about other principles. Paul said become all things to all men. So, here I go. I'm going to be on my process and on my way of becoming all things to all men and being around all these unbelievers as often as possible. And in the midst of that, somehow, the mission gets lost and the goal, the purpose, is just swept away, and there's a cloud that settles in; and all they're doing is just becoming friends with the world, and now they're enemies of God. These are two extremes that are unacceptable but rampant and prominent in the church. A lot of Christians, a lot of churches, adopt these kind of philosophies and approach to the world. Stay as far as away as possible, and make the world almost an enemy. And others try and look so much like the world that, essentially, there's no difference between their church and what you see in a business or the world as we know it.

We have the privilege of looking at the life of Christ. We have the opportunity. We have, really, the responsibility to learn from Christ. And one of these obvious ways that we can learn is how did Christ interact with unbelievers? How did He go about it? What was the model that was set forth for us? What can we learn? What principles are obvious from the way that He conducted Himself and interacted with these people? That's what we get to see today in Mark 2, looking at verses 13-17. If you join me, we're going to be reading these verses right now. I'll be reading from the English Standard Version, starting in verse 13; "He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 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 came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’ ” This is our passage for the morning.

We see two main things taking place in our passage. The first in verses 13-14, which we'll begin with - the calling of a tax collector, and then the second main portion taking place in verses 15-17, as we dive in here. So, verses 13-14 - we see the calling of a tax collector. And just to remind you, really, this has been an ongoing, unfolding of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and verse 13 continues that for us and continues to remind us of what Jesus has been doing in Galilee. In verse 13, we, really, see usual crowds and ministry - the usual crowds and ministry taking place in verse 13. Once again; "He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them." This is what we've been noticing over and over again so far in the gospel of Mark. As Jesus has approached this region of Galilee, as He has settled in and made it His home base, His place of ministry, He's been about the mission and the ambition of teaching. Teaching what? Mark 1:15; "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Jesus on this mission to bring this message of the kingdom coming and people needing to repent and get ready and believe in the gospel.

This has been Jesus' goal as He's gone throughout this region and gone from not just Capernaum, but city to city, even to the point that, after doing some of these miracles and having some of these times of teaching, He was driven out, as we saw in His interaction with the leper. Once He healed the man of leprosy, Jesus became so popular He had to go out into the desolate places in the wilderness. And people still came to Him, and they still crowded around Him, but after some time went by and kind of died down a little bit, Jesus was able to come back. And that's where we were last time, Him coming back into the region of Galilee, being in the home and healing the paralytic, and Jesus exercising and showing His authority to forgive sin.

And that brings us to where we are today, still here in Galilee as it says in verse 13; "He went out again beside the sea..." We've already seen Him do this in chapter 1. When was He beside the sea before? ...when He was calling His initial disciples. If you remember chapter 1:16-20, that's where we saw Jesus calling the two sets of brothers, Simon and Andrew and then also James and John, the fishermen who left their occupation, left their father, their fellow servants, the job, and immediately followed after Christ

in discipleship. Jesus is doing the same thing here. He's going out beside the sea, and there's a crowd coming once again. He's used to this as we remember in chapter 1 when He was at Simon's house, and He healed Simon's mother-in-law. Afterward, we see all the town of Capernaum, Mark says, the whole town, shows up with their sick and demon possessed, and He heals them. This is usual crowds and ministry for Jesus. Lots of people coming.

Lots of opportunities for Him to teach about the Kingdom continues to take place in verse 13 in our text; "...the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them." In verse 14, we're introduced to a new character in our book - the unusual calling of Matthew - the unusual calling of Matthew in verse 14; "And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him." Jesus is passing by, it says. He's already by the sea as we saw in verse 13, and He continues to pass by and encounter this new character Levi. So, He's by the sea. He's by the sea of Galilee, and Levi must be there as well with his tax booth or table, or whatever you want to call it, set up. So, this is, maybe, in the middle of Jesus's teaching, or, maybe, it's after He got done teaching and making His point. And then, He goes to Levi to interact and engage with this man. If you look in Mark's account here and Luke's account, he's called Levi. If you go to Matthew's account, he's called Matthew. So, either one will do, and this is not uncommon. You have times where there're characters in the Bible with two names; you have Saul and Paul, you have Simon and Peter. All right. These people that had two names often times is not that rare, so in the same way, we have Levi or Matthew. It's the same person, and that's what we find here; "...Levi the son of Alphaeus..." who is a tax collector as we know him. He's a tax collector.

At this point, we ask the question what do we know about tax collectors? And if you start to and kind of take what we have and our understanding of taxes and the system, and you impose that on understanding the text, it's, actually, not that far off. It's pretty good. We don't like tax collectors. Right? So, that's, really, what's taking place here. He is a tax collector, and the sentiment that we have is the same sentiment they had. It was not good. It was not favorable. The tax collectors then, they were, essentially, set out to estimate the worth of merchants' goods that were in transit, and they would collect taxes on those goods that were being moved back and forth, and those taxes were to be given to the Roman government. The Romans

were the ones, just as a reminder, that were in control of the land that the Jews were in. So, the Jews didn't have their own land. It was, really, the Romans that were in control. Therefore, they needed to pay taxes to Rome. And Matthew apparently dealt with the shipping trade as far as his taxing goes because he's by the sea. He's by the sea of the Galilee here. And this was an often common thing where people would be shipping things back and forth on the sea from the east side to the west side, and he was right there to receive these people as they came delivering their goods whether it was to Capernaum or other parts of Israel, and he would receive a tax of some sort. This is what he was doing.

Is it possible that Simon and Andrew knew him as fishermen? Is it possible that James and John knew him as fishermen? Is it possible that Jesus knew him, since He's already spent so much time in Galilee, and this is where He's set up? Probably. They probably already had some interaction with Him, and He already knew who they were, and they already knew who He was. The hard thing about being a tax collector is how vague your job was. There wasn't a set amount that was understood by all. Nine percent tax - that's what we're doing, and everybody knows it. It was vague and unclear. So, what tax collectors did was they charged all kinds of rates to get money, and then they would give whatever they thought and would buy off the Romans and make them happy, and then keep the rest for themselves. Tax collectors became very corrupt people. They charged higher and higher amounts, as much as they could because that's how they got their livelihood. So, they would defraud their own brothers and sisters in Judaism, their own brother and sisters in the Jewish culture there in Israel. They would just jack up the price and constantly give you unknown, wavering from day today, person to person, tax rates, and people hated that. They were despised because of this occupation and because of the way that they went about it. They were not good people. They were defrauding their own people. This was how they went about their job. This is how they collected. This was how they carried it out.

Well, how did people view this? As we've already alluded to, this was not a favorable thing. This was a corruption, already, and a defrauding of their own people, and so the Jews, essentially, viewed these tax collectors as excommunicated. They were outcasts in the sense of almost like the leper was that we talked about, just not in a physical ailment sense. These people were outcasts because of their very job and how they went about it. People

hated them, the outcasts of society, excommunicated. On top of that, you add the fact that they're working for Rome. So, here they are, a Jew living in Israel, stealing money, essentially, charging more amongst their own fellow Jews, and working for Rome who the nation of Israel and the Jews saw as the enemy. The nation of Israel, the Jews, wanted their own land, and they saw Rome as the opposition. So, when you had one of their own brothers or sisters working for Rome, they already did not like them. Cooperating with the Romans further alienated them from their Jewish brothers and sisters. We learn more from other Jewish documents at this time, and later on, for example, the Mishna prohibits even receiving alms from a tax collector at his office since the money was presumed to have been gained illegally. If a tax collector entered a house, all that was in it became unclean as they said and taught. The rabbis went so far as to say it was permissible to lie to tax collectors to protect one's property. That's okay. It's fine. Lie on your taxes all the time. All right. These are no good people. They don't deserve our money. That's how they taught. That's how they viewed these tax collectors. When a Jew entered the custom service, he was regarded as an outcast from society. He was disqualified as a judge or a witness in court, was excommunicated from the synagogue; and in the eyes of the community, his disgrace was extended not only to himself but to his family. It's terrible. It's a terrible job. People don't like you, and therefore, they treat you that way. They treat you as an outcast. You're excommunicated because of your corruption and defrauding. This is the general understanding of what tax collectors were like as we see in this time.

We go back to our text and we ask ourselves a simple question. Knowing all that, knowing all this of who these people were and how they acted and how they treated each other, we ask how will... how's Jesus going to interact with a tax collector? How will Jesus treat this man Levi? Maybe, Jesus will completely shun him, just absolutely ignore him, just look the other way, not even give him the time of day, not even make eye contact; or you know what? No, maybe, Jesus being the new spiritual revolutionary that He is on the scene, maybe, He'll rise up and give a sharp rebuke to these people in front of everybody. The whole crowd is there. He's teaching, and He goes, and this guy Levi, let me tell you how terrible he is and what he does. Maybe, that's what He'll do for good, make the stance very clear that we hate tax collectors and all they stand for, maybe, just like when He went to the temple, and He got the whip out and started beating people that were selling and doing business in the temple and how he overturned tables in the

temple. Maybe, in that same way, He'll go up to Levi and take his tax booth and throw it on the ground. Yeah, maybe that's what He'll do - all these expectations, potentially, in people's minds as they already have this presupposition of how they view this tax collector as a terrible person.

So, what will Jesus do? None of those things. Instead, Jesus walks up to Levi and says one phrase, "Follow me." ... "Follow me." This is His only response. This is all we see, Him saying, "Follow me." This is amazing. The same way that He went up to the fishermen that were fishing on the sea of Galilee, in the same way that He approached them and said, "Follow me," and enter into this teacher/learner relationship, enter into this relationship of discipleship where I teach you and show you how to live and how to go about life as I be a rabbi and instruct you and inform you, the same way that He called in this loving fashion, the fishermen, He's going to ask this tax collector to follow Him? That's unheard of. That's out of the question. There's no way that He would do this, that He would go so far, but Jesus says, "Follow me," the same words that He told the fishermen. "Follow me," enter into this discipleship relationship. How does Jesus treat unbelievers? Does He stay far away? Does He separate Himself? Does He shun them completely? Absolutely not. He comes right up to this tax collector and says I want you to "Follow me." I want you to learn and come and be a part of My life. This is how Jesus reaches out to sinners.

He reaches out to sinners of all kinds - doesn't matter if you're a fisherman - doesn't matter what your background is - doesn't matter if you're a tax collector and people hate you. Jesus reaches out. Still, today, Jesus is reaching out to all kinds of sinners around us in our world. He reached out to you. He reached out to me. And He still is reaching out to those that are stuck in their sinful ways. Some have gone hard after the pursuit of money. For others, it's happiness and amassing as much good will as they can. For others, it's fame and popularity. For some people, it's acceptance, feeling like they're a part. Other people are just addicted, flat out, to their fleshly lusts and passions. Jesus cares about each and every one of those people stuck in their sin. To the one that is seeking money, Jesus says, "Follow me," and I will make you eternally rich. To the one that is hard after the pursuit of happiness in all things, Jesus says, "Follow me;" I will give you eternal joy. To the one that is obsessed with fame and popularity and being known, Jesus says. "Follow me," and you'll be known by God, more importantly. To the one that struggles with acceptance, Jesus says, "Follow

me,” and I will not cast you out. To the one that is addicted, stuck in their fleshly passions and lust, Jesus says, “Follow me,” and I will give you eternal satisfaction. You will need to look no farther. This is Jesus’ heart for sinners, and this was shocking to the crowd, shocking to even the disciples to witness this, that Jesus would actually speak to a tax collector and go so far as to invite him into His life. This is Jesus’ heart for sinners - Jesus’ operation and how He treated and understood unbelievers in the world.

Mark gives us a very short version of this. All that we see as far as Levi’s response, “And he rose and followed him.” Nothing else, no other information. Luke gives us a little bit more. In Luke 5:28, he states, “And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.” It’s in the same way as the fishermen who abandon their nets, abandon their dad and their occupation and business to follow Christ immediately in that moment. You have the same thing happening here. This tax collector who would be done with collecting taxes - he’s done. He leaves everything to follow Christ, to rise and follow Him. This already seemed shocking and insane for the people witnessing this, how Jesus treats this tax collector, but this is just small in comparison to what comes.

And what we see in verses 15-17 is even greater than what we’ve already seen. The company of transgressors - the company of transgressors as we look at verses 15-17 once again; “And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ 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 came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’ ”

In verse 15, we see the situation clear with the dining - the dining with questionable company - the dining with questionable company. Verse 15 shows us... notice it says, “...as he reclined at table in his house...” Right away we might be a little unclear at who’s house it is. It just says “...in his house...” Is this Jesus’ house? What are we talking about? And it, really, from Luke again, we get some help. In Luke 5:29, he says, “And Levi made him a great feast in his house...” Levi’s the one who put on this banquet. He put on this feast. After Jesus reached out to him and called him, Levi invites

people to his house. So, this is at Matthew's house. Verse 15; "...as he reclined at table in [Levi's] house [or Matthew's house] ..." "... reclined at table..." What does this mean? This is just a cultural difference of how they would eat. The table would be low to the ground, and people would be, literally, laying on the ground just on their elbow on pillows, just relaxing and, literally, reclining and laying on the ground while they ate off the table.

So, this is the scene. It's actually in the house, and it's actually spending time together. It's not a quick grab a bite to eat and go. It's reclining. It's relaxing. It's talking. It's conversing as He reclines at table with "...many tax collectors and sinners..." Notice that. "...many tax collectors..." You thought it was bad already with Levi, now we have many more who were reclining with Jesus and the disciples; "...for there were many [tax collectors and sinners] who followed Him." I wonder how the disciples felt. This might of been a little awkward for them. All right. They're so used to their understanding of Judaism and how to picture tax collectors and sinners. All right. They are the outcasts. We do not even talk to them. We try and avoid them at all costs, and now here I am following Jesus in a house full of these tax collectors and sinners. Uncomfortable? Maybe a little bit. Maybe their conscience, maybe, even being pricked. Are they allowed to do this? Is this right? Is this okay? As they're there in this company, Mark confirms that these tax collectors aren't just people that are doing their job, but they are known in that time as bad people because he lumps them in the category of "...tax collectors and sinners..." All right. Not tax collectors and blue collar workers that work hard, right, this is "...tax collectors and sinners..." That's how they were viewed. Just put these two in the same category. They were the scoundrels, really, of first century Judaism in that time. The scene indicates there's many of them, too, not just Levi, many, many of them in that house and many that would follow Him as it says at the end of verse 15.

How does Jesus interact with the world? Once again, ask yourself that question. How does Jesus interact with unbelievers, with sinners, with tax collectors? He's a friend to them. He loves them. We're reminded of the hymn; "Jesus! what a friend for sinners! Jesus! lover of my soul; friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Savior, makes me whole. Hallelujah! what a Savior! "Hallelujah! what a friend!" This is Jesus, a friend of sinners, not completely separating Himself from them and saying I can't talk to you. I will not. He's in Levi's house. He's sharing a meal, spending time with these sinful people. This is Jesus's approach to the world and unbelievers.

Obviously this doesn't go too well as verse 16 shows us. People don't all feel good about this. In verse 16, we see the dispute, the dispute from the scribes of the Pharisees. Once again; "And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" We're introduced again to the scribes. We've seen them before in Mark's gospel. We've seen them as the experts in the Law, also known as the lawyers. They knew the Word really well. They knew what the Law taught. They knew the Old Testament. They had it memorized. They were the ones who not only knew it well, but were the ones that carried it out very well. But we have a new phrase here, a new word. These are the scribes of the Pharisees - the scribes of the Pharisees. And you might be mindful and heard of the Pharisees before, but this is the first time we see them in Mark. It's the first time they're mentioned.

So, it's worth understanding a little bit more here who the Pharisees were. And with the scribes, not all scribes were Pharisees. Not all experts in the Law were Pharisees. Some of the scribes were Pharisees. Some of them were Sadducees as we'll see later on, and some of them didn't associate with either. They were just independent, on their own as scribes. But in our passage, we have scribes who are Pharisees. And you might think, okay, going back in the Old Testament, did we have any Pharisees there? And no, you won't find any. You read through, you get all the way to the end of Malachi, and you recognize I don't see Pharisees. So, how do we come all the way here to the life of Christ, and now we have Pharisees? Who are these people? Where'd they come from? And a little history will actually help us greatly in this passage of why they have such a problem with this.

The Pharisees were a group of people that came to power, not really came to power, they came to popularity in between the Old and New Testament. In between the Old and New Testament, you had this constant rise of nations. All right. You had the constant battling back and forth (the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks), and then, essentially, you get to the Romans at the start of the New Testament. But during the time of the Greeks, and as they came, they came and conquered the land of Israel, but they let the Jews continue in the land of Israel. And there were two different people groups that were kind of sandwiching the land of Israel. It was the Seleucids in the north and the Ptolemys in the south, and so they kind of had to struggle back

and forth for a while over the land of Israel, and the Jews were caught in the middle, and they had to just basically submit to whoever was in control of them. So, whenever it was the Ptolemys that were in control of Israel and that land, they let the Jews do whatever they want. They let the Jews worship freely. There was a tolerance there, and they had the freedom to go to their temple and offer sacrifices.

But whenever the Seleucids in the north came down and they took the land, they wanted to impose and force Greek culture on the Jews. They wanted to cram it down their throats, even religion, so bad, that at one point, this guy named Antiochus Epiphanes comes up from the Seleucids, and he goes down into the temple in Israel in Jerusalem. He slaughters a pig, an unclean animal, on the alter in the temple and then renames the temple for Zeus. Pretty bad. All right. Pretty bad stuff. So, in that time, some of these Jews just gave in and did whatever the Seleucids said, but other Jews rose up and said we will not bow down. We will not follow this Greek culture. We will stay pure. We will stay set apart. We will be the separatists. We will be the puritans. And that is the beginning of the Pharisees. That's where the Pharisees came from. They prided themselves in this. They prided themselves in how good they were able to set themselves apart and be pure and on the high moral ground because they weren't like the pagans, and they weren't like the Greeks, and they weren't like any of these sellouts. They were true Jewish people, true people of the land. So, that's who these Pharisees are.

The scribes of the Pharisees are separatists, and they set themselves apart from anything that is not devout and clearly committed to the Law and what is clean and holy and right. Therefore, they're the ones that rise up, and they see Jesus and His disciples in a house with sinners and tax collectors known to be unclean. How do these Pharisees respond? They say why would you ever do that? There is no good that can come from that. We should know, we're the Pharisees. We're the ones that are experts at this, at being separate from all that because that's what we should be. We need to be separate. So, they would rise up, and that's what they do here. That's where this dispute comes from, and you might say, well, it doesn't look like they're too mad. You can't really tell. They just ask a question. Once again, we get help from Luke's gospel, and he adds the word grumbling. They're grumbling when they ask this question. This isn't a legitimate curiosity that they have. This isn't them wondering, yeah, why does Jesus "...eat with tax collectors and

sinner?” I’m just curious. Do they make really good food? Is there a reason for it? No, not at all. This is them grumbling, even in anger a little bit, saying who’s he think he is? How dare he go into this house with multiple sinners and tax collectors to eat. Why? Why would he do this?

These are the Pharisees, and they have perfected the role of taking the higher moral ground. They set themselves up, and they make sure you know it. They make sure you know that we are different, we’re not like you. In fact, we won’t even talk to you, and we won’t associate with you, and whenever we do things right, we’ll let you know because that’s how good we are, and we are the spiritual giants of this nations. That’s the Pharisees. Sadly, many Christians are still Pharisees to this day. Some of us are Pharisees. We elevate ourself on this high moral ground, and that’s how we view the world. We look down at the rest of the world, the sinners, the tax collectors, that we interact with and we see and we walk by. We look down at them. We think, maybe, when they get their act together, then, maybe, they’ll make themselves worthy of hearing about the gospel message. Maybe, when they clean up their life a little bit, then, maybe, they’ll actually get around to the point where I might talk to them and tell them about Jesus, but until they clean things up, I’m staying far away because this is me up here on my pedestal, doing everything right, being pure, being separate. That’s the Pharisees, and, unfortunately, that’s some of us, and that’s wrong.

As we see in Jesus’ response to these Pharisees. In verse 17, we see the desire, the desire of the Messiah - the desire of the Messiah. So, there’s this dispute, as we saw in our last passage, with the paralytic. They had these questions, but they kept it within themselves. They didn’t outwardly verbalize it or say anything, but now in this passage, they actually say something. Right? So, the dispute, the fight, is picked, and in verse 17, Jesus comes with the perfect response; “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 came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’ ” Jesus does a perfect job at laying out an illustration and then a perfect explanation to summarize what He’s doing. The illustration is simple. A doctor - what’s a doctor for? ...sick people. Why do we have doctors? Because we have sick people. If we didn’t have sick people, we would have no doctors - makes sense - very simple. So, Jesus says who is the physician for? It’s not for the well people. It’s not for the healthy. It’s for those that are sick and have that need. In the same way, Jesus turns it around and says I’m that physician. I’m that healer. I’m that

One who is here for the sick, those that are sinful and need it, not for the righteous.

And there's a couple senses here that you could understand His expression about; "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." What does He mean by that? "I came not to call the righteous..." In one sense, He "...came not to call the righteous..." because there weren't any righteous. We look around and we understand the teaching of Scripture. Very simple - there is "...none who does good..." "...no one seeks for God." "None is righteous..." So, in that sense, of course Jesus didn't come for those people, because they didn't exist, and He was the only one; but in another sense, He didn't come for the righteous because you're always going to have those people that set themselves up in self-righteousness. They think they have it all together. They think they're fine. They, actually, have no needs. They are the healthy person. They're the person that's well, and they don't need to go to doctors. Doctors who needs them? All right. That's what they are spiritually speaking. They have set themselves up, and they have no need. They're waiting for everyone else to figure it out and get to where they are. And Jesus says I didn't come for those people either because they don't even recognize they have a need; so, what can I possibly give to them when they have no need because they're self-righteous. Jesus said I didn't come for them, I came for the sinners. I came to call these sinners. Very clear here that He is not just also doing this for the sake of hanging out with sinners. He's not being casual. He's not being lax. He's not just having a good time with sinners.

As we learn from Luke's account, Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Jesus had a mission. Jesus, actually, had a goal in interacting with these people. These people, too, need to hear this message - doesn't matter how much of an outcast you think they are - doesn't matter how sinful you think they are - doesn't matter how far gone you think they are - they still need the same message. Everyone around us needs this message. Christ is coming back. You need to get right, and the only way to do that is to submit your life in faith to Him, to bow down before Him because of the offer of His life on the cross on your behalf and the washing away of your sins. Jesus came with a purpose in interacting with these people. So, sometimes people look at this passage, and they just run right down the aisle saying look-it here Jesus is interacting with unbelievers all the time, so I'm going to do that, too. He's a friend of sinners, and He's

only got sinners that are friends. This is what He does. That's not the case either because He's clearly calling them to repentance. He's calling them for a purpose.

The emphasis here for Mark and the emphasis also in Matthew is that this is the mercy of Christ. This is His mercy and His compassion towards not just the average every day person in Israel, but even these sinful tax collectors. Matthew 9:13 gives us a little bit more. Jesus says, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" Jesus says you Pharisees get a quick little lesson. You think you're so smart. You think you have it all figured out. You need to learn something still, something that God said in Hosea 6:6; "...I desire steadfast love..." "I desire mercy..." not your sacrifice of setting yourself apart from the world and never talking to them, that means nothing to God. He desires mercy. Jesus throws it in their face, essentially, and says I'm just doing exactly what God would do because I am God. He is the reflection of God in this event because He is showing His mercy and compassion, even on people that were so neglected and hated. They, too, need this message.

So, we come back to our own lives, and we come back and examine this and see how it's applications unfold. One - are we merciful? Are we merciful in the way that Christ was? Do we even have this heart for everyone, or are we really good at setting up filters? We get these filters going and we start to realize... not going to talk to them... not going to talk to them... that's someone I might talk to. Why? Why them and not someone else? Why do we have these filters that we put up? Why not be merciful to everyone, even the people that society doesn't really approve of? Do we have that mercy? Two - are we the Pharisee? Are we the Pharisee that rises up and takes that high ground and says why don't you work your way up to me, and then I'll think about sharing the gospel with you, then I'll think about telling you more about what you need? Such an arrogant place to be. And that's some of us; we rise up and we expect others to come to us when, really, what Jesus is doing is invading them. He's going to them. They're the ones that have the need, and He reaches out to them. He's not a doctor that goes to His clinic and locks the doors and stays inside. He goes out to those that are sick. In the same way, we can't be the Pharisee that stays inside and locks our self in.

We must go out and reach these people. This must be who we are. Hopefully, this is something that we can learn from, the mercy, the compassion of Christ, to look around at our world, to look around at people that we interact with, and to consider how we might invade their life; how we might actually interact with these people rather than shut ourselves off from them. And on the other side, hopefully, we're not so involved with the world that we've completely lost sight of what we're trying to do. Hopefully, we continue to remember the mission, and in our involvement and interaction with unbelievers, there is a purpose. There is a goal. There is an end that we're trying to reach, and that's for Christ to be glorified in their life as well as ours. May that be our purpose. May that be our balance, this balance that Christ perfectly showed. May that be the way that we approach the world and unbelievers.