

16 – Jesus Befriending Sinners

Series on Mark

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Bible Text: Mark 2:13-17
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Our Scripture reading is from Mark 2:13-17 which will also be our text this morning.
Mark 2:13-17.

13 And [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.

Thus far the reading of God's sacred word.

Our text words this morning are Mark 2:13-17 and I'll read just again the last part of verse 17,

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.

Our theme, "Jesus Befriending Sinners." We'll have three thoughts. First, Jesus calling Levi; second, Jesus feasting with sinners; and third, Jesus defining his mission. Jesus befriending sinners: calling Levi, feasting with sinners, defining his mission.

Dear congregation, all of Scripture is precious but there are certain texts in the Bible that are exceedingly precious, particularly those that summarize the purpose, the mission, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Spurgeon called them the big texts of the Bible. Well, we've got one of those in front of us this morning. "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." That's a big text, an exceedingly precious text but we need to look at the context to fully grasp such a big text, the context in which it is given. Now the

context here is a context of publicans, sinners, scribes, Pharisees, and Jesus all meeting in these few verses.

We meet a publican first. Verses 13 and 14 say that Jesus "went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him." And after meeting the publican, Levi, whose other name, by the way, was Matthew, as you know, that is, he's the first writer of the first New Testament Gospel, we read in verse 15 that Jesus feasted with other publicans, so not only Levi is a publican but Levi as you know in these verses, throws a feast in his own house and he invites other publicans and sinners. Then in verse 16, the scribes and Pharisees are complaining that Jesus is eating with publicans and sinners. So three times in five verses we're meeting this theme: publicans, publicans, publicans. So obviously we need to understand who a publican is if you're going to grasp this magnificent text that, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Publicans were notable sinners in the Jewish mind. In Jesus' day, of course, Palestine was under Roman rule and there were two daily reminders for the people of that Roman rule. The first was the presence of Roman soldiers walking around everywhere, and the second was the presence of tax collectors or better known as publicans who collected tolls on behalf of Rome. Now you know when you go on a trip, say through Chicago and you take 294 and there are six tolls just going around Chicago and it's irritating every time you've got to stop and you've got to pay a little bit of money again. There's a long line, it's inconvenient, and no one likes tolls. Well, the Jews didn't like tolls for deeper reasons than irritation. Every publican walking around was a reminder they were not an independent people and every publican irked their anger because, you see, publicans could stop them on the road at any point, they had the authority from the Romans, even though they themselves were often Jews, to just stop you. Say you're walking down the street and you've got a backpack on, they could ask you to open up your backpack and they'd say, "I want this and I want that." They had the right to take what they wanted because what they did was they not only taxed you according to the extreme limits of the law, the Romans had a high tax, but they would beyond that and then they would turn in your tax to the government and they'd pocket the rest. So they came to be hated by the Jewish people. They regarded them as hardhearted extortioners, as modern-day loan sharks, demoralized people who became rich at their own expense, which made the Jews despise them as traitors and apostates and put them at the level of harlots, notorious sinners, unclean lepers. These were the publicans.

So in one sense you could understand that the scribes and Pharisees were astonishingly upset with Jesus when they saw him sit down with publicans and sinners because on the one hand Jesus claimed to possess an authority above that of any prophet, well on the other hand, he befriended and feasted, feasted no less, with some of the most notorious violators of the law who were excluded by Orthodox Jews, by the way, from their church. Every publican was excommunicated from the fellowship of the church. In fact, beyond the excommunication of a sinner today because an excommunicated sinner is still welcome to come to church, the Jews in that day would not allow a publican to come into

the sanctuary. He was too detestable of a sinner to sit with them. They hated them. They despised them. So the scribes and the Pharisees were just astonished that Jesus would sit down, but then to feast with them. Feasting was a sign of fellowship and friendship and caring about someone. What in the world? This man, this prophet thinks he's got authority and he's righteous and he's feasting with publicans? How is it possible?

Well, the second group here is, of course, the scribes, the scribes being part of the Pharisees, you might say the scribes of the Pharisees. They're identified with the Pharisaic party, the strictest sect of the Jews, and they are particularly engaged not only in transcribing the Scriptures letter by letter, word by word, but they're also the official teachers of the people and they add to the Scriptures a host of rabbinic legalistic traditions. So they're known to be the opposite of the publicans. They're known for their religious externalism, their self-righteousness, their hypocrisy, and that's why Jesus calls them hypocrites.

Now in this context, Mark provides us with Christ's specific dealings with a publican named Levi. So after leaving Peter's house in Capernaum, Jesus makes a short trip to the sea of Gennesaret, which we know better as the Lake of Galilee, and the people flock around him as he comes. Verse 13 says all the multitudes resort to him and he taught them. It's in a continuing progressive tense, he continually was teaching them. That's what he came to do. Remember, even more than healing, he came to preach, he came to teach. So the idea here if you picture this in your mind, Jesus is standing by the Sea of Galilee, there's a group of people that come and he teaches them, and then that group leaves, takes a break or whatever, and another group comes, and it just keeps on going and going, and he's teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes, and he's exposing in his teaching the rabbinic traditions for what they were; he's exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees; he's teaching them that the kingdom of God is here now, that the kingdom of grace cuts through all the ritual and all the form and all the self-righteousness and leaves bare the hearts of men. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that are mourning. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." Just the opposite of what the scribes and the Pharisees were saying.

There's a man who has got a tollbooth there, his name is Matthew, and he overhears Jesus preaching, or if he doesn't overhear it directly, he hears about it from all kinds of people who pass by. His tollbooth is, of course, set up in the main thoroughfare, very close to where Jesus is preaching and people are coming and saying, "Matthew, Levi," he has two names, it was quite common in Bible times, "do you know what this guy is saying? This is unbelievable! He's attacking the scribes and the Pharisees and he's declaring that there is salvation for sinners!" This is radical, unusual. His fame spread abroad, Mark tells us. His fame spread abroad. Matthew cannot possibly be sitting there without hearing about it, if not hearing it itself.

So Mark is careful, you see, in his context, in his brief description, to give us the setting of all of this so that we can be persuaded that the very position of Matthew's or Levi's tollbooth and the very nature of his work, dialoguing with everybody that's coming by, is

such that it's impossible for Levi not to be intimately aware of what's going on around him in that area through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. But now suddenly this great prophet whom everyone is talking about, this teacher like no other that Matthew or Levi is thinking about this no doubt in his mind, trying to make sense of it, trying to put it all together. Suddenly Jesus himself goes by Levi and he stops and he turns and he looks him straight in the eye and with divine authority he says, "Follow me." Astonishing. "It's obvious who I am, I'm a publican. The Jews won't even talk to me and you're a Jew, you want me? Are you serious? Sitting at my tollbooth, a publican, you want me to follow you, a Jewish teacher, the rabbi?" What a calling. What an amazing calling.

There sits Levi and Jesus doesn't ask him to follow him, he doesn't plead with him, he doesn't say, "Levi, would you please follow me?" He commands him with authority, "Follow me." And the Bible says with beautiful, it's typical of the Gospel of Mark, Mark's writing, beautiful simplicity, "And he arose and followed him," almost as if the language of simplicity says, "It's not such a big deal. He just arose and followed him." It's a huge deal. The parallel account in Luke says, "He left all and arose and followed him." He left all. His whole life is turned upside down. From that day on, he's an entirely different man. He's effectually called by the Lord Jesus Christ. He leaves all and follows him.

You see, the beauty of this wonderful remarkable conversion is that all of the initiative of Levi's remarkable effectual call comes from Jesus. Jesus is passing by in the will of his Father, he sees Levi, he knows that Levi is one given to him by his Father from eternity past, and so he looks him in the eye, he commands him to follow him. Then there's this conscious response of activity on Levi's part. He rises up, he leaves all, and he follows Jesus.

You see, this is not in this context at least, Matthew or Levi's official call to apostleship as some say. In part it is that, but it's particularly, first of all, a call to be a disciple, to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and that's why the context, you see, underscores that by saying, "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners." The idea Mark wants to get across to us is this: sinners like Levi, sinners of the greatest stripe, the most detestable scum of society, there is no one too big of a sinner for Jesus to say to him, "You follow me." Jesus calls Levi.

Now when Levi gets called, Levi prepares a great feast, verse 15, and who does he invite? Well, when you get converted, who do you bring the Gospel to? All the people you know: your relatives, your friends. And who are Levi's friends? Well, he doesn't have any Jewish friends who aren't publicans because they are reject him completely, so he invites a whole group of publicans. Imagine that, all these detestable sinners, the scum of society, the riff-raff, the Palestinian mafia as the Jews would view these people. They're all gathered together and there's Jesus and the four disciples he's called, James and John and Peter and Andrew, and they're there having a feast together, a feast that Matthew pulls out all the plugs and he gives a great feast in his own house. He must have been already wealthy from all of the pocketed money and he brings out this great food and

there's this feast and the Pharisees, "What in the world is going on? Jesus is feasting with publicans, a great crowd of publicans and sinners?"

The phrase "publicans and sinners" just was a phrase used in that day to indicate that the publicans were just great sinners. They were unusually profligate. Harlots would be called sinners. Publicans are called sinners. It's just a phrase that went together. So this motley crowd is feasting that day in the house of Levi and the scribes and Pharisees can scarcely believe it and they come and see for themselves. They don't come into the house but they look. It's actually happening.

So they don't dare to go to Jesus himself so that's the way people often are when they're critical of other people, right, they go to someone else, they go to their friends. So they go to the disciples, you notice that, and say, "He eats with publicans and sinners." It's like an exclamation point and a question mark behind their accusation, both brought together. "How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" It's a question mark in the Bible here but it's also an exclamation point. "How is that possible!" It's not a question mark in the way that we ask a genuine question, it's an accusatory question. They've already prejudged him. "No one, no one could do this and be bona fide. He can't be what he says he is and sit down with publicans and sinners."

You know, there are two ways to ask people questions, right? You know that. One is to say politely, "Well, excuse me, sir, I'm sure there must be an explanation for what you're doing. Would you mind explaining it to me?" That's not the way they ask this question. The other way is to say, "What in the world do you think you're doing?" That's the way they asked this question. "What in the world do you think Jesus is doing sitting down with publicans?" So they've already got their own verdict, they've already got their own answer. This man is a fake. This man needs to be rejected. This man needs to be excommunicated himself.

So, you see, the relationship between the scribes and the Pharisees and Jesus is beginning to escalate in a negative direction. It's going to keep building in Mark 2 and in Mark 3, and what they're trying to do here is they're trying to undermine Jesus and even to undermine the confidence the disciples have in Jesus. They come to the disciples, they want to get the disciples back in their camp. "How is it?" It's almost like Eve, as the serpent coming to Eve in paradise, "Did God really say?" "How is it that the Master, you sir, could sit down with publicans and sinners? Could voluntarily identify with them?"

So this group of separated ones, this more holy than the publicans and Pharisees, they feel that the only way they can maintain the cause of righteousness is to exclude those who are beneath their dignity, to exclude sinners. Salvation is not for the notorious sinner. Salvation is only for the righteous. So they're furious with Jesus and Jesus takes their accusation and notice what it says, I just love this, you see, they went to the disciples and then you read in verse 17, "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them," Jesus always deals directly with the people, "They that are whole have no need of the physician," that is, of course, the scribes and Pharisees, "You," he's saying, "have no need for me because you stand in your own righteousness, but they that are sick, they need me.

I am not come for the righteous, for the religious. I have come for sinners to bring them to repentance."

Dear congregation, you've been hearing this message for decades and there are some of you who know your sinfulness, it troubles you, you're going out of yourselves to the Lord Jesus, you're casting yourself upon him as your only hope and yet when it comes time for the Lord's Supper you say, "I am too great of a sinner to come," and I'm saying to you this morning, you are making a huge mistake. What if there was a publican in that day who said, "Well, Matthew invited me to come to his house with all the other publicans but I can't come. I'm so unworthy. I can't come in the presence of that teacher who teaches with authority," and you'd miss out of that wonderful feast for publicans.

You see, the Lord's Supper is not for the righteous. If you are righteous in your own eyes and you're righteous in your own religion, you do not belong here, but if you are a poor sinner looking to grace alone as your only hope and you're overwhelmed with your sin and you say, "I can't understand how he would ever look upon me but I know he's my only hope," you belong here. Do you understand that? I'm afraid you don't. Please, please understand the Gospel. This is the Gospel. Let me read it again, "I came not to call the righteous. Be gone, self-righteous! But I came for one purpose, to call sinners to repentance, to me, to come and pour out their sin, and I will do everything for sinners. I will feast with them. I will suffer for them. I will die for them. I will arise for them. I will intercede for them. I will take their place. I will take their sins so I can give them my righteousness. I'll take their hell so I can give them my heaven. I am come for this purpose." Do you understand what an offense it is to Jesus Christ when a poor sinner, exactly the kind of person he's come for, stays away from the Lord's Supper? "I came exactly for you."

For Levi. Then he even makes Levi an apostle. Isn't that amazing? He makes a publican one of the 12. Phenomenal. "They that are whole have no need of the physician but they that are sick." So sick people need a doctor. That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? Jesus doesn't look at sick people and say, "Shame on you. You're sick. Sick you shall be." No, he's a good doctor. He says, "You're sick. Come to me, I can heal you. I've got medicine. Come to me just as you are, poor sinner."

So, you see, he comes with this glorious proclamation. He's saying to the Pharisees, this is an amazing statement, he's saying to the Pharisees, "I haven't come for the likes of you but I have come for the likes of Levi, for publicans, for sinners. I come in close proximity to them. I've come to live the life that sinners did not live. I've come to die the death they deserve to die. I've come to provide a righteousness which when imputed to them as they trust me through faith, through Spirit-worked faith, will stand the test of my Father's eye and my eye on the day of judgment. But you Pharisees, you have a righteousness that passes the test of your eyes but not my eyes and not my Father's eyes. My Father and I know you are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness and legalism, but the despised sinners around me in this banquet, they know they're not right with God and they're welcoming me as their heavenly Physician. They're listening to my teaching and they're understanding it, they're responding to it, they're following me."

Are you following Jesus? Are you coming as a poor sinner to him? It's your only hope. If you are, you see, you belong at the Lord's Table. If you're not, you don't. It's that simple. "This is a faithful saying and worthy to be accepted of all, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief," not of whom I am small but chief. He welcomes chief sinners. He loves to make trophies of grace out of notable sinners who are weary of sinning. "Come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest."

The poet says, "Jesus comes, the prisoners to relieve, in Satan's bondage held. The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield. He comes the broken hearts to bind, the bleeding souls to cure, and with the treasures of his grace, to enrich the humble poor." Don't stay away from Jesus Christ, poor sinner. He has promised he'll never reject a poor sinner. Come, broken-hearted one. Come, bleeding publican. Come, sinner who thinks you're the worst sinner in the whole church. Look to the Savior, sinners. Say with that same poet, "Thy promise is my only plea, with this I venture nigh. Thou call burdened souls to thee, and such a Lord am I."

You see, this big text comprises one of the Bible's clearest statements about Jesus' mission even as it comprises one of the Bible's saddest illustrations of self-righteousness' blindness. What a difference between the scribes and the Pharisees, self-sufficient, and the publicans waiting on every word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who are you? Are you the self-righteous Pharisee and you've got it all put together so well and you look down on everyone else and you are the one who can gain acceptance somehow with God? I trust there's no one who feels that way, but if you do, you're so far from the truth and you're not a recipient for the Lord's Supper but if you come poor and needy in yourself, looking to Jesus, you're welcome. You're welcome. You're more than welcome with Jesus. Amen.

Let's turn now to page 137 in back of the Psalter. Last week the first page, 136, the first column of the second page was read for preparatory examination, and page 137, column 2 picks up from there and looks at the second part which is directed to that end for which Christ hath ordained and instituted the Lord's Supper, namely to his remembrance.

Let us now also consider to what end the Lord has instituted his Supper, namely that we do it in remembrance of him. Now after this manner are we to remember him by it. First. That we are confidently persuaded in our hearts, that our Lord Jesus Christ (according to the promises made to our forefathers in the Old Testament) was sent of the Father into the world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; that he bore for us the wrath of God (under which we should have perished everlastingly) from the beginning of his incarnation, to the end of his life upon earth; and that he hath fulfilled, for us, all obedience to the divine law, and righteousness; especially, when the weight of our sins and the wrath of God pressed out of him the bloody sweat in the garden, where he was bound that we might be freed from our sins; that he afterwards suffered innumerable reproaches, that we might never be confounded; that he was innocently condemned to death, that we might be

acquitted at the judgment-seat of God; yea, that he suffered his blessed body to be nailed on the cross—that he might fix thereon the handwriting of our sins; and hath also taken upon himself the curse due to us, that he might fill us with his blessings: and hath humbled himself unto the deepest reproach and pains of hell, both in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken of him: and finally confirmed with his death and shedding of his blood, the new and eternal testament, that covenant of grace and reconciliation when he said: "It is finished."

Secondly. And that we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his last Supper, took bread, and when He had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me; in like manner also after supper he took the cup, gave thanks and said, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do ye as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me": that is, as often as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you shall thereby as by a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this my hearty love and faithfulness towards you; that, whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given my body to the death of the cross, and shed my blood for you; and as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood, to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink the same with your mouth, in remembrance of me.

From this institution of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that he directs our faith and trust to his perfect sacrifice (once offered on the cross) as to the only ground and foundation of our salvation, wherein he is become to our hungry and thirsty souls, the true meat and drink of life eternal. For by his death he hath taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, namely, sin, and obtained for us the quickening Spirit, that we by the same Spirit (who dwells in Christ as in the head, and in us as his members), might have true communion with him; and be made partakers of all his blessings, of life eternal, righteousness and glory.

Besides, that we by this same Spirit may also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love, as the holy Apostle saith, "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." For as out of many grains one meal is ground, and one bread baked, and out of many berries being pressed together, one wine floweth, and mixeth itself together; so shall we all, who by a true faith are engrafted into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for Christ's sake, our beloved Savior, who hath so exceedingly loved us, and not only show this in word, but also in very deed towards one another.

Here to assist us, the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves before God and in true faith implore his grace.

O most merciful God and Father, we beseech thee that thou wilt be pleased in this Supper which we celebrate the glorious remembrance of the bitter death of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, to work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that we may daily more and more with true confidence give ourselves up unto thy Son Jesus Christ, that our afflicted and contrite hearts through the power of the Holy Ghost may be fed and comforted with his true body and blood, yea with him, true God and man, that only heavenly bread, and that we may no longer live in our sins but he in us and we in him, and thus truly be made partakers of a new and everlasting covenant of grace, that we may not doubt but thou wilt forever be our gracious Father, nevermore imputing our sins unto us and providing us with all things necessary as well for the body as the soul as thy beloved children and heirs. Grant us also thy grace that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Savior, in all tribulations with uplifted heads, expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven where he will make our mortal bodies like unto his most glorious body and take us unto him in eternity.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Strengthen us also by this holy Supper in the catholic undoubted Christian faith whereof we make confession with our mouths and hearts saying, I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty and from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in holy catholic church, communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

That we may be now fed with the true heavenly bread, Christ Jesus, let us not cleave with our hearts unto the external bread and wine, but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is our Advocate, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, whither all the articles of our faith lead us; not doubting, but we shall as certainly be fed and refreshed in our souls through the working of the Holy Ghost, with his body and blood, as we receive the holy bread and wine in remembrance of him.

Dear congregation, the Table is ready, the preparatory sermons have been preached, you've had time to contemplate and all those who are invited are those who are publicans and sinners in themselves but leaning on the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask now that seniors and those who need a bit of time to come to the Table, please come forward and remember the death of the Lord until he comes.

He's a glorious precious Savior and, friends, his coming for publicans really cost him his life, it cost him his reputation, it cost him everything. You see, if Jesus had just catered to

the Pharisees, it would have been an entirely different ministry but they crucified him because they could not handle the Gospel. We sometimes forget the historical redemptive process of those three years of our Lord's ministry. The text this morning is so much at the heart of the Gospel because it's Jesus determining to give himself for sinners and giving himself for sinners means he had to come against the Pharisees and it had to bring him trouble, and he had to be crucified.

There are still a half dozen seats here, please, if there are others who would come.

So it's critical that we learn over and over and over again in our lives this man comes to receive sinners. Sinners. That's all we are sitting here right now, just sinners, but sinners saved by grace, sinners saved by someone who is not a sinner, who was willing, as it were, to become sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. So that's what we commemorate so do this right now in remembrance of him, a sinless coming for you, the sinner, that you, the sinner, may find peace in the sinless Redeemer.

Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank thee so much, so much for the Gospel. Were this not true what we preach this morning, Lord, then there is no hope for any genuine child of God whatsoever. If thou didst not die and thou wast not resurrected, we would be of all men most miserable, but thanks be to God, thou didst suffer, thou didst die, thou wast resurrected, thou art at the right hand of the Father for sinners. So we come, Lord, as sinners to thee this morning. Please feed our souls now, sinless one, and please encourage us with the radicality of thy grace toward us. Free, one-sided sovereign grace, O how sweet the sound of Jesus' name in a saved sinner's ears. May that be once more our experience now. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The bread we break is the Communion of the body of Christ. Take and eat as he has said, "For this is my body which is broken for you and for many for the remission of all, all your sins past, present and future."

So what do we learn from Jesus' converting Levi? What do we learn for ourselves this morning? I just want to meditate with you a moment about that. I think we learn the radical individuality of his effectual call. Every conversion is different, your conversion is different than the person sitting next to you, but for every one whether it's more gradual, whether it's more sudden, it's radical. It's a calling. He calls you. He stopped by you in your life, didn't he? When he stopped by you he said, "Levi," or your name, "follow me," and you experienced something that you can't put into words, didn't you? Something that was gripping, something that was authoritative and you couldn't resist anymore. You had to come forward to the Lord's Supper, you had to follow him, your life changed, you now want to do his will even though you're still just a sinner in yourself. You see, you are Levi. You are Levi. You're the publican and he comes and he calls and he stares at you and he looks you in the eye and he says, "Follow me." It's a radical call.

So you can be in church and you're with a lot of people in church but it's as if he calls you all by yourself; as if it's just Jesus and you in church. The preacher falls away, the people

fall away. He's looking at you straight in the eye, as it were, under the word of God or while you're reading the Bible at home. He's dealing with you and he says, "Follow me." And he says it not once but again and again all our lifetime so that we are moved not only to arise and leave all and follow him, but again and again we know it's his calling. The first time, yes, that's special, but for every time thereafter, every day there's this inner calling, "I've got to follow Jesus. I get to follow Jesus. What a glorious thing that is. I've got someone worthy to follow. I've got someone who can save me and keep me saved to follow. I don't have to be my own master. I don't have to be my own self-righteous person. I don't have to concoct some righteousness up before God. He's done it all. It is finished. I just have to follow. I just have to follow him." What a Gospel, a radical Gospel of individuality because he calls you efficaciously.

The cup. "This cup is the new testament in my blood. Drink ye all of it in remembrance of me, for it is for many for the remission of all your sins."

What we see in this text this morning, not only the radical individuality of Christ's effectual call but the incredible graciousness of that call. It was just pure grace. Levi didn't have any right to it, Levi couldn't expect it, Levi is just a sinner. Why would God call Levi? Why would Jesus stop by Levi of all people? There's just no reason in Levi, absolutely zilch, no reason in Levi. It was pure demerited favor from God to Levi. "Follow me. You, Levi. I've chosen you with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I called you and drawn you."

You know, every one of us deserves sitting around this Table, to be a reprobate. We've sinned thousands of times. We deserve to be a trophy of God's wrath and his venging justice, but he came to you and he said, "Sinner, follow me," and he stopped you and he turned you around and he's still dealing with you, but the amazing thing is he deals with you now in love, in amazing love.

So it's all grace, you see, it's all one-sided sovereign grace. If you talked to Levi, he would have said, "This is the most astonishing thing imaginable, that Jesus would stop by me! By me!" So he wants to get all his friends together, he wants to tell them all, "I want to tell you what Jesus has done for my soul and if he can do it for me, he can do it for all of you." You see, that's what the Gospel does. It's so amazing that Jesus would save that you just say it's all pure pure grace.

And that Jesus doesn't care what the Pharisees think about him because he loves Levi so much it shows you the magnitude of that grace. "But Jesus, aren't you worried about your reputation? Aren't you worried that all the religious people....?" "No, no, no, I love Levi. I love Levi. I'm going to spend my time with the publicans." Oh, the grace of God to you, to me, grace that took him all the way to Calvary's cross and grace that now has him at the right hand of the Father, remembering you every single second, Hebrews 7:25, he ever lives to make intercession for us, as if you were his only child even though he has millions of them. Isn't that amazing? Every tick of the clock, he's remembering you. Levi. Levi. Levi. Levi. Praying for Levi. Just put your own name in there. It's not just what he did on Calvary, it's what he's doing now and what he shall do when he comes again to take you to be with him forever.

So this call, "Follow me," is a lifelong call. It's actually an eternal call because what is heaven? Heaven is just following Jesus forever, only sin free. What a joy that will be to be no more standing in the way of his call. Pure grace from eternity past to eternity future.

Well, let's give others an opportunity to remember the death of the Lord once more, the Lord Jesus invites. Poor sinners, publicans, those who have no righteousness in themselves but whose hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, to come and to remember the death of the Lord, to remember what a great Savior this greater Joseph is, a Savior who not only says, "I am Joseph, but I am Joseph, your brother." Your brother. Your brother born for adversity. Your brother born as a companion in the midst of sorrows. This Savior is ever-faithful and ever-kind and he will never forsake the work of his own hands. What a glorious thing this is, Jesus, lover of my soul. Lover of my soul.

Let's pray.

Lord God, we ask again for thy blessing and we pray, commune with us that we may commune with thee. We love thee, Lord Jesus. We love thee so much. We love thee more than anything in this world, even our dearest loved ones, but we know that we love thee because thou hast sovereignly graciously loved us first. So to thee be all the honor and all the glory and all the praise. Bless us now with a felt sense of that staggering love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. "Take and eat," as he has said, "for this is my body which is broken for you and for many for the remission of all your sins."

Radical individuality, radical graciousness, but thirdly now, there is a radical sovereignty, a radical sovereignty about his call, isn't there? Why did he choose you? And why not perhaps your brother or your sister or a friend or someone maybe who is more likable than you are by nature? You just think that God would pick that person and God says, "No, Levi," specific, you see, "follow me." That's just pure sovereignty. It's a radical sovereignty. God chooses second born Jacob, not the firstborn Esau. He chooses a second born Abel, not the firstborn Cain. He makes surprising choices and every believer feels like he's a surprising choice because every believer says, "If you only knew my heart. If you only knew the wicked lust of the flesh and the pride of life and the lust of the eye in my life, you would say no, no, God would never choose me."

"Levi, Levi, follow me." Levi? You? "Yes, you." Because he's sovereign. He's free to choose whom he will and this is humbling. Sovereignty of God, by nature we hate it and by grace we just love it because if he weren't sovereign, there's no hope for me, there's no hope for you. So he comes. No one in the whole world expected him to stop by Levi except Jesus and he says, "Levi, follow me."

Why are you sitting here this morning? He came sovereignly. Praise his name, praise his name, for his sovereign grace. Remember A. W. Pink saying that when the Lord began to work with him, sovereignty was the one attribute that was such an obstacle for him and he said when the Lord worked through it, it became his favorite attribute.

"This cup is the new testament in my blood. Drink ye all of it in remembrance of me for the remission of all your sins."

But there's something else in this text, there is a response from Levi. It's God's one-sided, free, sovereign, gracious gift but then there's a fourth thing, Levi's whole-souled response of obedience. He left all and rose up and followed him. There is a beautiful simplicity, there is a beautiful wholeness. You know, God is essentially one and our dilemma in life is we try to be two, we're bifurcated, we try to put one foot into Christianity and one foot into the world, but when God comes and conquers us and despite our ongoing sin and it remains a burden to the end, but despite it there is this whole soul desire, this whole soul response, "I will leave all. I will live unto him. I will follow him."

So in one sense grace is free because he has merited it all, in another sense grace is costly because it costs us our life. "Take up the cross and follow me." Deny yourself, you see. Deny your whole tendency of self-righteousness. You've got to surrender the battle. You've got to lay the weapons down in the Gospel to follow Jesus completely, unconditionally, a whole-souled response.

That's what Levi does and he wants everyone to know. He's drawn the line in the sand. You see, that's what happens when you come to the Lord's Supper, you draw the line in the sand. You have just publicly once more let the whole congregation know, "I cannot live by my own righteousness. I can only live by the Lord Jesus Christ."

That's what Levi wants to do so he calls all his friends, "I'm just going to tell you all I'm a new creation. I've got a new purpose. I've got a new goal in life. My whole life has been turned upside down." He left all. He left his tollbooth. He left his whole way of life, his whole way of thinking. It's all upside down. He lived to pocket extra money, now he lives to tell others about Jesus. What a difference? He gets all his friends together, "I'm a new man. I leave all."

Dear friends, is there something you're clinging to from your old life that needs to go? Let it go. Let it go. Curse it. Kill it. Follow Jesus. So much of the Christian joy is hampered because we don't let everything go and leave all and follow him. O God, help us to leave everything for Jesus' sake. Help us to have a single eye, thy name to glorify. Help us to live exclusively for our Savior who deserves everything of us. Give us pure-hearted zeal for our Master. That is my wish for you and for me, the joy, the zealous joy of a whole-souled obedience and a whole-souled response, and the same Savior who saved you and called you can give that to you. Ask him for it and ask that you may grow in it, that you may grow and say no to sin and yes to Jesus like Levi who left all.

Let's give others an opportunity to show forth the death of the Lord. "Come to me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Rest for your soul. The rest of hope in the midst of human hopelessness. You have tried it, haven't you? You've tried to find hope in yourself. You've done everything you could do, you say, to establish your own righteousness and just became a greater sinner in your own eyes.

There is no hope in self-righteousness and, you see, that's exactly why the entire Pharisaical system is fatally flawed because there is no hope in the righteousness of man, there is only hope in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the tragedy is that most religions in the world are Pharisaical at root, "It's God and me, God working together with me to save me," instead of free sovereign grace.

Is there anyone else who can say in their souls by the grace of God, "I've become a lost sinner before God and I need salvation"? You are welcome here now, otherwise we will close the Table as there are several seats. So no one else who has come to the end of your own righteousness?

Oh, may God help us all and may God work in your soul that wonderful work that you might say, "I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God and make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." That's what life is all about.

Let's pray.

Gracious God, please bless thy word. Bless thy sacrament in these moments. O, work in us, Lord, that growing forsaking of all that we might know Christ and the power of his resurrection more and more through thy Gospel, gracious sovereign Gospel love. Lord, bless us now, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. "Take and eat," as he has said, "for this is my body broken for you and for many for the remission of all your sins."

So it's an individual call, it's a gracious call, it's a sovereign call. It calls for whole-souled response and part of that whole-souled response of obedience is there are evangelistic and missional claims that come to us when God calls us. That's what Levi felt. He didn't only leave all, he followed Jesus, and what did it mean to follow Jesus? Well, for Levi it meant to get all his friends together to have a feast and to invite Jesus and to have Jesus talk to all his friends. What is he hoping? He's hoping that Jesus will say to every one of them, "Follow me. Follow me. Follow me." He gets a big evangelistic heart.

One of the greatest encouragements, I think, when someone gets saved is then they, "Oh, what about my dad? What about my grandmother? What about my sister? They need to be saved. How can I tell them? How can I evangelize them?" You see, once you really understand the Gospel, then you want others to understand and it's humbling but it's urgent. "They could die. They could go to hell. They need to be saved. Pastor, what can I do?" Levi calls a feast and he invites Jesus and he talks, Jesus talks to them but Levi does everything he can. You see, that's the way you need to respond to the call, to the effectual call. You've got to reach out to others, give them books about Jesus, talk to them about Jesus, tell them, "If he can save me, he can save you." Come with love. Come low. Come humble. Come and say, "I'm nothing but a sinner but I found the purpose of life, I found joy in life, I found meaning in life, and if I can have it, you can have it. Come, fellow publicans."

The efficacious Gospel call always calls for a response, a whole-souled response but that whole-souled response takes feet and arms and outreach. It talks. It includes. It appeals. It speaks to others. You can't be silent. Jesus has saved you from the wrath to come, speak to others. Levi did. It's not so hard. Just tell them. You don't have to be a preacher. You don't have to be a theologian, you just tell them what Jesus has done for you and what he can do for them.

"This cup is the new testament in my blood. Drink ye all of it in remembrance of me for it is the remission of all your sins."

Now finally, there are unending consequences to this efficacious call. Unending consequences. It's a life-long call. It's an eternity-long call forever. You see, I'm not just called once and now I'm saved and I go back to my old way of life. No, I'm called and the call of God weighs upon me. It's like a vow. My whole life becomes a vow, an oath to live unto Jesus. "Give me a single eye, Lord. Thy name to glorify."

So that call keeps coming, "Levi. Levi. Levi. Live for me Live for me." And that call, you see, stamps you so when someone says, "Who are you?" really what we should say is not, "Well, I'm a homemaker, or I'm a chemist, or I'm a mechanical engineer." We should say, "By the grace of God, I'm a Christian. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. That's who I am. That's my real identity. I reckon myself dead unto sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ my Lord," Romans 6:11. That's who a Christian is.

So let it be your prayer and your cry each day when you wake up in the morning, "Help me to be like Levi, to follow, to leave all to live like a Christian today, and help me to look forward to that one great day when finally I'll be a perfect Christian and I'll follow Jesus forever perfectly in the realm of glory without one sin, every following the Lord."

Let's just meditate on that a moment. Eternal following in heaven. Just think about it for a moment and then praise God that you've never become, despite your sins, a de-follower or a stop-following Jesus person. Every time you sin, go back to him and say, "No, Lord, this is not who I am to be, I'm to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Forgive me." And get back in line and follow him, follow his word, follow his truth, follow his person, follow him forever and forever.

Gracious God, we thank thee so much for following grace, for calling grace, following grace, persevering grace, restoring grace, and we pray, help us forever to glorify thee and to be eternal followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord hath now fed our souls at this Table, let us therefore jointly praise his holy name with thanksgiving and everyone say in his heart thus, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all they diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies."

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. He hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, for as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Who hath not spared his own Son but delivered him up for us all and given us all things with him. Therefore God commendeth therewith his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, much more then be now justified in his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life. Therefore shall my mouth and heart show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth forevermore. Amen.

Let's pray.

O Almighty merciful God and Father, we render thee most humble and hearty thanks that thou hast through thy infinite mercy given us thine only begotten Son for a Mediator and a sacrifice for our sins, and to be our meat and drink unto life eternal, and that thou givest us lively faith whereby we are made partakers of such great benefits. Thou hast also been pleased that thy beloved Son Jesus Christ should institute and ordain his Holy Supper for the confirmation of the same. Grant, we beseech thee, O faithful God and Father, that through the operation of thy Holy Spirit, the commemoration of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ may tend to the daily increase of our faith and saving fellowship with him through Jesus Christ thy Son, in whose name we conclude our prayers. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen.

SUNDAY MORNING

6/18/17

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Votum and Salutation

Psalter 394

Reading of the Law of God

Scripture Reading:

Mark 2:13-17

Prayer

Psalter 398

Sermon Text: Mark 2:13-17

Jesus Befriending Sinners

1. *Jesus calling Levi*
2. *Jesus feasting with sinners*
3. *Jesus rebuked by the Pharisees*
4. *Jesus defining His mission*

Psalter 426:1-3 (standing)

Reading of the second part
of the Lord's Supper form

Psalter 426:4, 5

Administration of the

Lord's Supper

Psalter 426:7-10

Closing Prayer

Psalter 112

Doxology of Praise (pg. 415)

Benediction

SUNDAY MORNING