

Introduction: One would almost expect that the subject of the passage is the “publicans and sinners.” They are huge. They are the ones Jesus endeavors to reach. They are the ones over whom the argument ensues.

2:15-16

and sinners also sat together reclined together (in that custom; reflected in the ESV) **with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners,** If you wonder what we mean by **sinners** then I’ll take you to a story in Luke 7 where a woman is washing the feet of Jesus and a man named Simon is thinking in his heart, and says, “If Jesus knew what kind of woman this was who is touching Him He would not allow it because she is a sinner.” The implication is that this woman makes her money sleeping with men of wealth. She sins...and is good at it. And so in an afternoon, all the wealthy tax collectors and franchisees of Rome are sitting at a meal with Jesus and so are their escorts. A room full of wealthy, lost people and their purchased girlfriends.

We should talk much about them...but not objectively. No, they must be discussed in relation to three other parties. I wonder which one best finds you:

Well, then, suppose the Scribes and Pharisees were our focus. Certainly, we could punch them around a little?

2:16b

they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” It’s not a bad question. Haggai 2:13, Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 15:34, 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 confirm that prolonged relationships with ungodly people are not good for you as a believer. I don’t need to argue this point because the text doesn’t require it. What you have is a man who is newly saved and has a set of friends who don’t know the “new Levi” and so they quite naturally, on the evening of this meeting, gather to meet this man that shows up and tells Levi/Matthew to follow him. Let us not be under the allusion that Jesus was here to “hang out” and “network”, or even to “approve of Matthew’s friends.” Jesus tells us the reason He is there among Matthew’s friends in the next verse.

There’s nothing in the passage that tells us the Pharisees were in the house. How did they know what was going on? There’s nothing in verses 15-16 that says, “And Jesus and His disciples sat down with Matthew, the publicans, the sinners and the Pharisees.” No. Pharisees wouldn’t be caught dead in the house but oh, how they love to spot those who are. What are they doing? Can you see them? Oh, how miserable they are!

Jesus is not eating with the scribes and Pharisees because the truth is they see themselves as righteous. You can never be a repentant person because you’ve never repented, because you’ve never been a sinner. The real problem with the Pharisees is they can’t be saved. No good Pharisee ever gets saved. No good scribe ever gets saved. You have to become a sinner or you have no Savior; you have no Physician.

The biggest issue, though, is that the critics don’t think they’re sinners. Isn’t a “sinner” by definition somebody who “sins?” Have not the **scribes and Pharisees** considered the darkness of their own hearts? The answer is “no.” And those who see no sin within them see no Savior outside them.

Well, then, the hero of the story must be Matthew. That’s where our focus lies?

2:13-16

Then He went out again by the sea;¹ and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi Matthew 10:3 says “Matthew” is a “tax collector” and that is why we believe this **Levi** is Matthew. **the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office.** When people would cross over the Sea of Galilee into Jewish land, they would come over into Capernaum and the IRS was already there. They were ready to collect duties and tariffs and taxes and excises. The wealthy Hebrews would bid out for the opportunities from the Romans to collect taxes. It so happens that the best tax collectors from the Jews were Jews. And so the Romans knew that and they figured that the best way to get this done would be to hire a Jew. A Jew that was

¹A detail not shared in Matthew.

religious enough that everyone would know he was a Jew, but godless enough that he didn't mind taking money from his countrymen.

Matthew starts out a wealthy man or else he could not have afforded this franchise. The franchise fee was so high that only the wealthy could afford it, but low enough that the wealthy could pay it off within a couple of years of owning the franchise. Everyone hated publicans. This is not your typical tax collector. This is the type just like Zacchaeus (Luke 19), who actually was kind of a middle-man.

And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Were there others there to watch the booth? We're not told. What prompted Matthew to follow this guy? We're not told. **15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors behold, many publicans.** Oh my goodness. There are empty tax offices all over the city. And entire guild of thieves is empty. Maybe it's after hours? Maybe there was a shift change? We're not told.

they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" The answer is because they are Levi's friends, and Levi is fishing. Why is this included here? Because it is natural to bring your friends to Jesus after you are affected. As in the last text we find "getting your friends to Jesus," we find the wonderful opposite here of "getting Jesus to your friends."

1. Jesus, our one point sermon. Understanding His ultimate mission (Matthew 10:45), and it's culminating daily requirement of preaching "repent and believe the Gospel" (1:14-15 and 1:39).

2:17

When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, One thing is clear, Jesus was interested in being a physician. He was ready to heal, particularly, those who were "sin-sick." Every one of our churches should pray as Pastor Spurgeon "Great Physician walk this hospital. Come and look on each special case, and may there be a masterpiece of Thy heavenly surgery in the case of each one of us."²

but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, ⁴to repentance." Perhaps you have a version of the Bible that does not have "to repentance" at the end of its verse. I have made a choice that reflects that of the KJV, the NKJV for three reasons: 1. It seems more likely that the phrase belongs in there. Why? Because the prepositional phrase acts as a "direct object" or a "receiver of the action" (to what are sinners being called? They are being called to repentance).³

"How do I know it is His desire to heal folks from sin?"

Because in the next phrase we have a reference to "sinners repenting."

Of what are they "repenting?"

Their sin.

"What is sin?"

It is our crimes against God that keep us from peace with the King of His kingdom. Jesus is calling people as a "preacher of the Gospel of the kingdom" (1:14-15; 1:39) to leave their rebellion against Heaven to embrace

²C.H. Spurgeon *The Pastor in Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 138.

⁴ NU omits *to repentance*

³If you don't buy that, how about the mere fact that Jesus is "calling [them to Himself]" which supposes they are leaving something else: their sinfulness qualifying them for the title "publican" or "sinner."

If you don't buy that, how about the first chapter's flow of John baptizing unto "repentance" for "remission of sins." They seem related and seem furthermore to naturally carry on with their connection in Mark 2:17. Moreover, the "calling of five disciples" thus far notes a "leaving of nets and fishing" and "leaving a tax office [in order to] follow [Jesus]."

Heaven's king. Imagine going to Heaven and finding people who love Jesus...but love their sin more. Since there is no sin in Heaven, perhaps you should ask whether you can live with hating there what you love here?

Yet in the deepest of our soul, if you find a panting after that which is holy and a desperation to be saved from your sin, I might admonish you to rely on your Savior to save you from your sin, and to desire a greater desperation that He do the same.

So are you willing to say that it is people who know they are sinners in need of repentance with whom He is sitting? After all, He calls them sinners, and to the Pharisees He says, "These folks need Me because I'm a doctor and they're sick." And sick people are, well... sinners. So if you are willing to say Jesus hangs out with sinners, I will go with you that far, as long as you'll go with me when I tell you the reason He goes to eat with sinners is to get them to repent. Not to dilly-dally with them and build a relationship with them, no. We need sinners to become repentant sinners, and then they look like Matthew. They get up and leave everything.

"Well, we just need to be more like Jesus."

I agree. Let's call more sinners to repentance.

"Jesus wouldn't judge."

Really? Because He just called a house full of people **sinners**. Here's some judging happening there. Otherwise Jesus would not be having this conversation.