

Message #7**Mark 2:13-22**

One of the most colorful politicians was Fiorello LaGuardia, who was mayor of New York from 1934-1945. One of the most famous stories about him occurred in 1935. It was a bitter cold night in New York and he showed up at a night court in a rough area and told the judge to go home and he would handle the cases that night. Within a few minutes an old woman was brought in before him who was charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told Mr. LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her and her daughter was sick and her two grandchildren were starving and that is why she took the loaf of bread. The store keeper would not drop charges. He said this is a bad neighborhood and the people must learn a lesson and that she must be punished. Well, LaGuardia said, "I have to punish you—the law makes no exceptions—ten dollars or ten days." As he was pronouncing this sentence, he reached into his own pocket and took out a \$10 bill and tossed it into his famous hat and said, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom 50 cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." He collected \$47.50 and gave it to the woman and he gave 50 cents to a red-faced grocery store owner. Now here is the thing. While some 70 petty criminals, traffic violators, who had just each given 50 cents, saw what the mayor did, they gave him a standing ovation. The store owner was baffled and embarrassed and the law-breakers were cheering. That is the way it is between those who are legalists and those who grasp grace.

We come now to the first mention of a group known as Pharisees. It is the first appearance of the religious group known as the "Scribes of the Pharisees" (2:16). This was a specific group of Scribes intricately connected to the Pharisees. One writer said these Scribal Pharisees were "legalistic nitpickers." The word Pharisee means separatists. These were rigid, strict separatists. They don't understand grace and they hate Jesus Christ.

So far, we have seen that Jesus called four fishermen to become part of His elite team. This didn't seem to upset anyone, but this next selection of Levi (Matthew) causes a major theological war. This episode is so critical that it is recorded by Matthew (9:9-15); Luke (5:27-35), and here in Mark. What we see from this is this:

WHEN JESUS CHRIST CHOSE A TAX COLLECTOR TO BECOME PART OF HIS UNIQUE TEAM OF DISCIPLES AND THEN WENT TO HIS HOUSE AND ATE WITH HIM AND HIS SINFUL FRIENDS, IT CAUSED MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS, LEGALISTIC, RELIGIOUS PHARISEES BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WANT GOD'S NEW SYSTEM OF GRACE THAT SAVES SINNERS.

These Pharisees controlled the religious world and they did not like the fact that Jesus Christ was making a huge impact on the people who went to their religious services.

We want to make some key observations about this:

OBSERVATION #1 – Jesus was again out by the seashore teaching the people. **2:13**

The primary focus of the ministry of Jesus Christ was not miracles; it was teaching. By His own example, He is showing His own disciples that to fish for men you must preach and teach. Preaching and teaching was what He devoted Himself to doing and any church that is following the pattern of Jesus Christ will be one that is devoted to careful preaching and teaching of God's Word.

Now Christ did a lot of preaching in synagogues and He did a lot of preaching by the seashore. Mark stresses this point multiple times (**2:13**; 3:7; 4:1; 5:21). There was no building in existence that could house the number of people who were gathering to hear Him teach, so He went to the open spaces of the seashore.

OBSERVATION #2 – Jesus saw Levi sitting in the tax booth. **2:14a**

Now out by the sea there were tax booths where people would pay a fee or tax to use the roads or the harbor. This was kind of like government fees we pay to use state and national parks. Kind of like a recreation fee you pay to get out on a lake.

Now a tax collector typically purchased a territory which gave them exclusive rights to a specific area. This is the way hunting and fishing outfitters operate today. They purchase a specific area for their guides. A tax collector would purchase a franchise for a specific area. The Roman government demanded a certain amount of assessed taxes, but the tax collector could also add more as a way of making his own income.

As Jesus was passing by, He saw a man named "Levi," who was the son of Alphaeus, sitting at his toll booth. Levi is his Jewish name, but Matthew names him Matthew (Matt. 9:9) and later Mark will refer to him as Matthew (Mark 3:18).

He was the "son of Alphaeus," which may mean he was the brother of James because Mark mentions the same father's name for James, although this could be a different Alphaeus (Mark 3:18).

What we do know is that Levi was a tax collector. He was hated by the Pharisees. In fact, he was probably one of the most hated and despicable man to the mind of a Hebrew. He was a Jewish man who worked for Rome, collecting taxes from Jewish people. Pharisees considered them to be traitors.

The fact that his name is Levi probably made the hatred against him even more intense. The tribe of Levi was supposed to be dedicated to a religious vocation involved in Temple stuff and this Levi was a businessman taking taxes for Rome. He must have been a real tribal disappointment.

Perhaps you have been considered to be somewhat of a disappointment to some of your relatives because of your background. Don't let that faze you one bit. You turn your life over to the Lord, because God is in the business of doing great things with Levi-types.

OBSERVATION #3 – Jesus invited Levi to follow Him. **2:14b**

This would be a shocker to the Pharisaical world of religion. The last guy on earth you would ever expect Jesus would call to be part of His ministerial team would be Levi. But this shows you that God's choices often go against the choice of the self-righteous crowd. As soon as Jesus invited Levi to follow Him, "he got up and followed him." This guy is leaving a very lucrative career.

One commentator said I have seen God call into His family some of the most unlikely people you would never expect. He has called drunks, pimps, prostitutes, strippers, actors and actresses, athletes, gamblers, horse racers and car racers. God has called doctors and nurses and teachers and factory workers. He has called people from shops and ships. God has called those who have been in jail, those who have been addicted to every addiction known to man and has put them into His family and church and even into ministry; and whenever He does it, it baffles the Pharisaical religious world and leaves them scratching their heads.

Jesus called Levi and it did not take long for word of this to spread. Jesus had invited what most considered to be some low life to become one of His discipleship team, and he immediately left everything and followed Him.

This is amazing because of all the people in the Galilean area, this would be the last guy you would ever expect Jesus would pick.

This is sure great news for the rest of us because what this shows us is God delights in calling flawed people to Himself. Jesus' invitation to believe on Him is open to all comers and all sinners.

OBSERVATION #4 – Jesus was eating at Levi's house. **2:15a**

Levi decided to have a dinner party at his house. There were probably two reasons why:

- 1) To introduce his friends and coworkers to Jesus Christ;
- 2) To say goodbye to them because he was leaving to travel with Jesus.

Ray Stedman, a pastor from California who died in 1992, who was a great Bible teacher, actually out of Dallas Seminary in 1950, said that one time a man who had been an engineer was leaving his position to go into ministry. So he gave a huge luncheon and invited all of his friends and associates to the luncheon and he asked Ray Stedman to come speak to the group about Jesus Christ.

That is exactly what Levi did. He held a company party and he wanted everyone to meet Jesus.

Luke tells us this was held at Levi's house (Luke 5:29), which must have been like some Beverly Hills mansion. As one commentator said, this was no "shack." This was undoubtedly a palatial mansion.

OBSERVATION #5 – Jesus was eating with many tax collectors and known sinners. **2:15b**

Actually the truth is anytime Jesus did anything with anyone, He did it with sinners. This is something most religious people just don't understand. As one commentator said, Jesus was eating with people no different than us.

Now these Pharisees expected these kinds of people who weren't given over to their strict religious traditions to be destroyed. They certainly did not expect Jesus to sit down and eat with them.

Here was Jesus in the home of a big sinner, eating and drinking and talking with other sinners. It made these Pharisees mad. By the way, Jesus is not drinking Kool-aid or Diet pop; He is drinking wine, which will be proved by the very illustration He will give. This still makes Pharisees mad to this day.

This was the big problem with the Pharisees. They did not see themselves as sinners. In fact, these Pharisees saw themselves as law-keeping, pious people right with God.

Kent Hughes told a story that he took from William Barclay. There was a woman who was living with a man of another race by whom she had a baby. The woman was poor and one day she decided to attend a woman's meeting at church. God was beginning to work in her life and she decided she needed to go to church to be near Christians. She came many times. One day the minister contacted her and asked her not to come anymore because if she continued to come, the other women would not come. The woman said, "I know I am a sinner, so where are sinners supposed to go?" (*Mark*, p. 71). In the end, God led her to another group and eventually her life was turned over to Jesus Christ.

This is the way Pharisees operate. They don't see themselves as sinners and could not figure out why Jesus Christ was eating with these sinners. Well sinners can go to Him because He came to save them.

OBSERVATION #6 – Jesus' disciples were questioned by the Pharisaical Scribes for eating and drinking with these people. **2:16**

The Pharisaical Scribes now go from reasoning in their hearts (**2:6**), to speaking with their mouths (**2:16**).

Now the people Matthew had invited to his home and the people with whom Jesus was eating and drinking were not those who typically fit in with the religious leaders. They were not those who went to their religious services and kept their man-made traditions and rules.

This made these boys mad. These kinds of people do not have the integrity to go to Jesus, but they will try and pull His disciples off into a corner to question them. But Jesus heard them. He is God and He heard everything.

OBSERVATION #7 – Jesus responded to the Pharisaical Scribes. **2:17**

It must have been a major shock when Jesus starts answering their questions, which they don't even think He has heard. He is surrounded by hundreds of people and they are talking to some of the disciples by a sea and Jesus hears every word.

Jesus said something here that, as one commentator said, "is glorious doctrine in any age." He said these are the very kinds of people I came to save. I did not come to call you self-righteous boys to salvation; I came to call sinners to salvation. It isn't you healthy people who need a physician; it is the sick.

Jesus says to those of you who think you are righteous, I have nothing to say to you and I have no invitation to give you. But to those who admit they are not righteous, I came to save them. **If you actually think there is no sin in you, you are beyond help. Jesus offers you nothing. But to those who see themselves as sinners, Jesus offers you everything.**

Now of course the Pharisees assumed that they would be held in high esteem in the kingdom of God. Jesus said you aren't even going to get into the kingdom unless you admit you are a sinner who needs a Savior.

OBSERVATION #8 – Jesus is questioned by John's disciples and the Pharisees. **2:18**

Now John's disciples and the Pharisaical Scribes were not normal allies and friends. However, both groups were interested in getting into the Kingdom of God. The Pharisees were non-believers who, for the most part, would not admit they were sinners; and John's disciples were, for the most part, believers who did admit they were sinners in John's baptism.

Now we don't know why John's disciples were fasting; it could be they were following the traditional religious activity of the religious leaders who fasted twice a week on Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12).

What this clearly shows us is that even some believers can become rigid and legalistic and lose sight of the freedom one has in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus was not only eating with sinners, He was not fasting like the rest of the religious people. Jesus was not fasting and neither were His disciples.

OBSERVATION #9 – Jesus responds to the Pharisees. **2:19-22**

Jesus gives three explanatory illustrations to the legal criticism. You may be certain of this point and that is the illustrations given by Jesus would not improve His relationship with the Pharisees and it may have even upset some of John's disciples.

Explanatory Illustration #1 - The illustration of the bridegroom. **2:19-20**

Who in their right mind would want a bunch of stone-faced or grim-faced fasters at a wedding feast? The presence of the bridegroom is a time of feasting, not fasting. It is a time of rejoicing, not mourning.

But Jesus warns that a time will come when He will be taken away because they reject Him, and then people will fast in that day.

Explanatory Illustration #2 - The illustration of the clothing patch. **2:21**

Now in these next two illustrations Mark uses an adjective "new" three times. He uses it once in **verse 21** and two times in **verse 22**.

In **verse 21** the word is kainos and in **verse 22** the word is neos. Kainos stresses brand new in existence and neos stresses new in time. **By combining these two adjectives, the meaning is Jesus Christ is offering a brand new system of grace redemption. This is new in time and brand new in form.** If you take an old sail on a boat and patch a hole with a brand new piece of cloth, when the material gets wet and dries, you will end up with a bigger hole. Jesus did not come to patch up the old system. He came to bring a brand new system.

Jesus did not come to try to patch up the O.T. law with some new grace. He came to bring a brand new system of grace. The law stands for what it is, a death sentence, and grace comes and offers the way out.

Explanatory Illustration #3 - The illustration of the wineskin. **2:22**

This illustration proves the wine was fermented. Wine is put in a new wine skin and as it ferments, it expands. If you put new wine just made in time in an old wine skin, when it expands the brittle old wineskin will burst and you lose both the skin and the wine.

Jesus came to bring a new system. Jesus did not come here to reform the old system; He came to bring a brand new system. If you try to combine the two systems of law and grace, you ruin both systems.

The new news is any sinner may have a relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ. No matter what your sin or background, believe on Him and you will be saved.