**Jesus Loves the Sinner**

**Mark 2:13-17**

**Jesus was just passing by the tax collectors office and saw Levi, the one we know as Matthew and said “follow me.” He came to do a specific task in this world, to bring the sinner to repentance. Levi was a tax collector. Tax collectors were by vocation or morality placed outside the society of God’s people. They hung out with the sinners and Jesus was about to dine with them all, tax collectors and sinners alike. His calling was to the sinner or the one who had gone astray, who was separated from the flock. He was looking for that one. He found that one in Matthew the tax collector. He was not looking for someone worthy to follow Him, but someone who needed Him. In a moments notice this tax collector followed, when he called to him, “Follow me.” That’s how it should be for everyone, when we come to Christ. One moment we are sinners and in the next moment we are followers. When we make that choice to follow Him, we are fellowshipping and dining with the King of Kings.**

**Setting the stage for this scene, the disciples Peter, Andrew, James and John were already following Him and had witnessed many miracles. They had seen Him heal Peter's Mother-in-law from a fever and sickness (Mark 1:29-31), the demon possessed man healed (Mark 1:23-26), the paralytic healed (Mark 2:3-12). Jesus had just come from healing the paralytic man who was lowered into the house through the roof. He had already had a run in with the Pharisees after healing this man and telling him his sins were forgiven. That was all the more reason for the Pharisees to want to stop Him and accuse Him of further blasphemies. "He just happened to be passing by and saw the man named Matthew sitting in the tax collectors office. And all He said was “Follow Me”. And Matthew arose and followed Him.” Matt. 9:9**

**It is interesting that Matthew did not question him, or hesitate, but just simply arose and followed him like the other four did. It should be the same for us. When Jesus says come to Me we shouldn’t hesitate, we should just run to Him with open arms. We need to put our will in His hands in order to be a follower of Christ. To be a true follower is to give up our own desires and leave our old life behind, to never look back. It doesn’t appear that Matthew ever looked back. He quickly, without hesitation left his tax collection agency and followed the Master. Jesus loved the sinner and even chose them as His disciples.**

**It was a definite occasion for a celebration at Matthew’s house that night. Jesus was there with His disciples along with the other tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees just happened to walk by and see this strange mixture of people. According to Jewish law they were not to commune and surely not eat with these well-known sinners. When they saw Jesus there, He again incited anger from the Pharisees. Jesus always meets us where we are. He is looking for the lost, so He went to search in the places He would find them. When one goes astray He goes out to find them. All believers are called to “go into the highways and the byways and compel them to come in(Matt. 22:9).” He wants to dine with us, those who were once sinners and are now “followers.” He loved us even when we were sinners, Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God is not angry at us, but loved us so much He sacrificed His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ for us (John 3:16). Jesus said hate the sin, but love the sinner. He loved us right from the beginning. He could see beyond who we were and saw who we could become. He qualifies the unqualified and justifies the unjust.**

**This is hard for the world to understand, because of this kind of fellowshipping Jesus wasn’t accepted by the Pharisees. He was judged and talked about, accused of being a blasphemer, and eventully seized and killed. We might be judged and talked about even by our family or friends, but our suffering is nothing compared to what He went through by taking all the sins of the world on Himself to redeem us. There is no greater love than a man laying down his life for his friends, Jesus is our friend and a friend to the sinner (John 15:13).**

**The Pharisees came to His disciples and asked “how is it He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners (verse 16)?” Then Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (verse 17).”**

**The Pharisees couldn’t understand what He was talking about. They were stuck on what He looked like dining with the sinners and tax collectors. Judging with their eyes, they didn’t understand His compassion, mercy, and grace.**

**Who were the sick He is speaking about? These are all sinners. The sinner is spiritually sick, sentenced to die an eternal death. These who were sick needed a physician, Doctor Jesus made a house call. He said to Matthew, I am coming to your house for dinner and I want you to invite all your friends. Matthew was a tax collector and tax collectors were well known to consort with the sinners, the two went hand in hand. So Jesus knew who would be coming to dinner. He was setting up the perfect scene for healing of the sinner, through repentance, the perfect medicine for the sick. If Jesus did not go to the sinner, how would they know to repent and how would they be saved?**

**We Must Tell Them**

**Jesus was showing us how to be followers.**

***Romans 10:14 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”***

**Just as a doctor would not refuse to come help the sick person, Jesus did not refuse to help the spiritually sick. Because others were talking about who he was hanging out with, he didn’t stop going to the sinner, he was not a people pleaser. He knew they needed to be free from their sin and gave them a way out. But they never would have known if He hadn’t gone to tell them.**

**Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Someone must come to tell them, Jesus set the pace for His followers. We are to tell others about the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, death and resurrection.**

**Jesus was a God of Compassion and Mercy**

**Matt 9:13 says, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”**

**We need to learn of His mercy, by looking at the character of God and asking Him to make us more like Him each day. The medicine Jesus brought was mercy for the salvation of the sinner. The righteous didn’t need this medicine, only the sinner. He was telling them He no longer desired sacrifice, but mercy. This word mercy in the Greek is *eleos*, meaning compassion, tender mercy, kindness, beneficence, an outward manifestation of pity. Jesus is a compassionate Savior, who has mercy on the sinner.**

***“Mercy is not merely a passive emotion, but an active desire to take away the suffering and distress of others.” This was Christ’s way.***

**Psalm 78:38 tells us of the Fathers’ compassion for the sinner. “But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them.”**

**Jesus had compassion on the multitude Matthew 9:36 “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”**

**He is our good shepherd, who leads us into the path of righteousness and without His mercy he would never call us to follow Him, like he did the disciples. Even today, He is still calling the lost and spiritually sick into the kingdom of God, through us. We must go and tell them with that same mercy and compassion for the sinner as He has. We cannot fear what others will think if we reach out to a person who is less than perfect in the world's eyes; a former drug addict, ex-prostitute, or from the wrong social class. Did we forget what Jesus' mercy and compassion did for us? When we go to the byways and the highways to compel them to come in, it may not be pleasant or comfortable or where others would think we should go. I know that when I was in Slovakia we ministered to the Gypsies and even some Christians were advising us to not trust or minister to them. It was a true demonstration of the Pharisees approach to Jesus.**

**God told Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” Romans 9:15**

**So He sent His only begotten Son that we might have eternal life. We cannot deny the mercy and compassion of our Lord who gave the ultimate sacrifice for us.**

**And Hosea prophesied “I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they shall be called sons of the living God.” Hosea 1:10**

**Why would God have such compassion on us? Romans 9:23 “and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”**

**Yes, because His compassion and mercy is for all to know the riches of His glory through Christ Jesus. He could have left it exclusively for the Jews, but His mercy and compassion are beyond selfish ways of man. That is why we cannot understand it without the Holy Spirit's help. God's ways are much higher and His thoughts much higher than ours. God is not a respecter of persons. He loves all sinners.**

**Jesus was Tempted like We are**

**“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15**

**He understands the human condition, because He came to earth as a Man and God, the second person of the Trinity. The compassionate heart of Christ can be worked in us by the Holy Spirit, who makes us sensitive to the pain of humanity and the need of the sinner to have a Savior in Jesus Christ. We need to be able to weep with those who sorrow and grieve. Jesus wept when his dear friend Lazarus died (John 11:35), even though He knew that Lazarus would be raised from the dead, because of His compassion.**

**The Love of Christ in us is able to look beyond the outer flaws of the sinner and see the inner pain and torment that they need to be set free from. We need to show the same compassion to others that Christ showed to us when He died on the cross to save us. Jesus said “follow Me”. Don’t hesitate; run after Him. He is giving us the same message today, as He did to Matthew and the other tax collectors and sinners, "Follow Me." He loves all sinners the same, even as He loved you and me when we were still sinners. Receive His mercy and grace today if you haven't already done so and be born again in Christ.**