

The Trouble with the Pharisees

Mark 2:13-17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, March 24, 2024

Well, I want to say thank you for letting me get away last week to my grandmother's funeral in Tennessee. Thank you for Robert for preaching kind of last minute there. She was 96 and she was buried in a cemetery in a place called Blue Goose, Tennessee. True story. And it's named after the Blue Goose convenience store, kind of in the middle of nowhere. Most people there don't even know where it is. But my grandfather had nine brothers, seven of them are buried there. So the name Cagle is on so many tombstones, sort of surreal to see that. But I got the chance to preach from her Bible. And in her Bible, and in the front cover, she had a couple of these, you know, the old Bibles where they wrote the births and deaths, you know, and she had, I guess, she thought maybe if she lost one of them, she had to write it again, because she had like five of them where she wrote all these births and deaths. And in one of them she had put Job 1:21, in the front of the Bible, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed to be the name of the Lord." And under that she had written the phrase, I think she heard it in a sermon, that God is on both sides of the grave. We have nothing to worry about. And so I preached that to my family. And I want to say that to you this morning, too. If you're in a trial, God is on both sides of the trial. If you're in a tribulation or difficulty, the Lord will be on both ends of it; you have nothing to worry about, Amen? And so I had a chance to minister that message to my family. I traveled about 48 hours in five days, I counted it up. I got some terrible plane tickets to get there and back, but I can tell you anything you didn't know about the Calgary airport. I got a free donut there so that was good. But anyway.

Well, let me pray for us. And we're gonna dive right into the Word of God this morning.

Heavenly Father, we're coming to you today asking for Your help as we study the Pharisees. That's a name that sort of sends a little bit of a chill down everyone's back. And we hear that name and cringe. And yet, Lord, so many of us in our own heart of hearts, think like they did. We think we're better than others. We're holier, we are more righteous, just go on down the list because we're religious people. And that's the danger of these men, Lord. And I pray as we approach this subject, our hearts would be tender and we would not want to judge those who judged others, but we would look at our own selves, our own lives, in light of this interaction with the Lord Jesus Christ. Of all the men in the Bible, these the ones that He fought with the most and we don't want to be like this. So we pray for Your help, that we will learn great things this morning in Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I don't know if the name Jeffrey Dahmer is familiar to you or not, but he's considered to be one of the most hated men of all time. During the 1980s, he killed 17 people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and then went on to cannibalize them. At a time when most people thought that sort of behavior was a thing of the past. He brought it back to light in a trial that was horrific to the point that the media labeled him

the Milwaukee monster. And the judge handed down 16 life sentences to him in his trial, the most that was ever given in that state at that time. But the most interesting thing about him is if you study his life, while he was in prison, someone shared the gospel with Jeffrey Dahmer, and according to him, he became a Christian. Then he was baptized. And then he joined a local prison Bible study that met once a week until the time of his death in 1994. The local prison chaplain said he'd never seen anybody change like that. The man's life was a testimony to the grace of God.

I say all that to ask you the question, do you think God can do that? Do you believe God can save a man like Jeffrey Dahmer. I ask you that because some people don't. They think that his sins were too much for God to forgive. While the Lord might forgive other people and show grace to them, He could not do it on his behalf. He's just too evil. In fact, when he said he was a Christian, you could read in the media how the people just despised the idea of it. I'm gonna say if you think that way this morning, I want to tell you, you're wrong. The Bible doesn't say that. It teaches the opposite. God can save a man like this.

And in order to show you what I mean, please turn to the Gospel of Mark. That's the book we're in today. But please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark where it tells the story of a man who was saved from an unforgivable lifestyle. Or what the Jews would have considered to be unforgivable. We don't probably look at it this way, but they did. In Mark 2:14 it says this, "As Jesus passed by, He saw Levi, also known as Matthew, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax booth."

And that doesn't come across well when you first read it, but that means He saw Matthew sitting in the hated tax booth, sitting in the despised tax booth, sitting in the ugly, disgusting, reviled, filthy tax booth. And He said to him, "Follow Me." That means follow Me and be saved, Matthew; follow Me and be a Christian; follow Me and leave your former way of life behind so you can have your sins forgiven, which makes you wonder why. Jesus only had 12 disciples, why pick this guy? The answer is found in verse 17 when it says, "It's not those who are healthy, who need a physician, but those who are sick. For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." In other words, Jesus did that because He did not come to save those who thought they were good. He came to save those who were bad and knew it and admitted it and confessed it and went down on their knees and asked God for mercy, which is what Matthew did.

If there was anyone who needed Jesus Christ in his salvation, it was this guy. The law, he broke it; the commandments, he failed them; the Torah, he could not keep it at all because the Jews threw tax collectors out of the temple. They wouldn't even let them go in there to make a sacrifice. So this guy was as lost as he could be. You could not get any farther down on the on the religious scale than him. And Jesus saved him because He said, "That's exactly the kind of person I'm looking for. While the rest of the world wants to run away from this guy. I want to run to him."

And to be honest, that kind of message seems a little odd, doesn't it? I mean, it's not what you would expect to see coming from the lips of Christ because most of us grew up in a place that told us there's

two types of people in this world. There's us and them, right? And for us in the church, there's mercy and grace and forgiveness when we fail because Jesus runs to us. Because we're way up here. But for them, He doesn't because they're beneath us. All those sick and twisted people in the world are down here at our feet. That's not what it says, is it? In this story, who does Jesus heal? He heals sick people. And who does He come to save? He comes to save those who are down here, which means that's how you have to see yourself if you want to be a Christian. There's not two types of people in the world. There's only one and that's the sinner.

Which sounds simple doesn't it? I mean that right there is a very basic message. It's hard not to get it in the passage, but I want to tell you, some people don't get this today. They come to church with a different attitude. They're called the Pharisees in the Bible. Do you see that? You can see their name in verse 16. It refers to a group of people in Israel, who told the Jews that in order to be saved, you have to look like us. You don't have to follow Jesus or come running to him like Matthew did. First and foremost, you have to learn how to keep our rules and our opinions and our preferences. That's how you become a Christian. Interestingly enough, we're going to be introduced to them for the first time here, and it's not going to be a pretty sight because instead of commending the Pharisees for their zeal, Jesus is going to tell them they're wrong. Because who are they to tell everyone to keep their preferences? They're nobody. And what right do they have to shove their opinions down everyone's throat? They don't. And so He's gonna end up rebuking them for it.

My friends, I want to tell you, if He did that, for them, He would do it for us. God hates it when you come to church and you say, there's two types of people in this world, us and them. And He can't stand it when you show up here, and you tell everyone they can't be saved until they keep your preferences. Who are you to say that? You're nobody. What right do we have to talk like that to a lost and dying world? We don't have it. You're not God. You don't set the terms of salvation; He does. And the terms of salvation are this. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Amen? That goes for murderers. That goes for criminals. That goes for tax collectors, and it goes for people in the church.

In this story, Jesus will save one of the most despicable people imaginable in the first century and He's going to do it right in front of the Pharisees so they can get the message that this is for anyone who believes, whether they keep your rules or not. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at three stages to the trouble with the Pharisees. So if you're taking notes this morning, we're going through the Gospel of Mark, and we're just taking it one story at a time as we see them in the text. And the story this morning is about the trouble with the Pharisees. There's three stages to it in Mark 2:13-17. I'm going to walk you through them one at a time.

The first one is the call of Matthew. The first stage to Jesus' trouble with these guys, these Pharisees, is the call of Matthew. This is where the confrontation begins when Jesus helps this humble, broken sinner. By the way, I think this is a very important text for us to study because you don't want to ever throw water on the salvation of a humble, broken sinner. When someone comes into this church and they're

converted, do you want this to be a place where they love being? We want people like that in there. If they're rough, we want them. If they're edgy, we want them. Let's talk about this.

Let me just say as you come to Mark 2:13, you're going to find yourself in a familiar place in this story. When it says that Jesus went out again by the seashore. See that word there, seashore? That's a reference to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which lies on the outskirts of the town of Capernaum, where the Lord was at this time. It's a body of water in the northern part of Israel that's home to more than 13 species of fish. It's the largest freshwater body of water in Israel. It has carp and tilapia and sardines in there that were sold to markets all over the region. In fact, anytime you hear about a fisherman story in the Gospel of Mark, you can bet it's happening around the Sea of Galilee. It served a major role in Jesus' life. And it explains what happens next because verse 14 says that as Jesus passed by, He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus. And if you want to write this verse down, Matthew 9:9 calls him Matthew. It's the guy that wrote the first book in the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew. He's sitting in the tax booth, because he's collecting taxes there. The idea is that as the fishermen came in and sold their produce in the town of Capernaum, it was Matthew's job to make sure the government got its cut of the action. We love those people here in Canada doing in Tennessee, we call them revenue earners, and they're not welcome in the mountains. Some of you heard those stories.

I need to stop for a moment say a few words about this because there's even more to this job than that because Matthew didn't collect taxes for Israel, he collected them for Rome, which made his actions very dubious, to say the least because he shouldn't have been doing that. The Romans conquered Israel in 63 BC and as soon as they did, they started oppressing the people and forcing their will upon them as any foreign oppressor did. Making them submit to Roman law, Roman rule, Roman custom, and Roman leadership, and worst of all, they made them pay money to fund all that. They would send men around every so often in order to demand funds to help them cover the vast expenses of their empire, the Roman Empire was about 2 million square miles of land, you could imagine how much money it would take to keep that afloat. And so they would take over a territory and then find some people to go out and basically pillage them. And Matthew signed up for the job. When the Romans asked, "Which of you would like to take money from his fellow Jews, he raised his hand and basically became a traitor. He sold his soul to the enemy just to make a buck. The way it worked is that there were two types of tax collectors who worked for the Empire. First there was the *gabbai* or general ones, it's a Jewish term, who were responsible for visiting the people personally and taking their money with threat of force. They would take soldiers with them, if you resisted, the soldiers would rough you up. Then secondly, there was the *mokhes*, chief tax collectors, remember Zacchaeus in the Bible, he was a chief tax collector, the little guy climbed a tree. He would sit behind the scenes and oversee the process by setting the rates. That's what the *mokhes* did. So for example, if the Romans said they wanted to charge 2% taxes on all fish caught in the Sea of Galilee, in order to make a profit, the *mokhes* would go to the Jews and say we charge 4% and they had to pay it. And not only do we charge 4% on the fish, we charge 4% on the boat you caught the fish in and the dock you landed in and the donkey you put the produce on to take it to market, it was just a racket. You think Canada is bad. Which is why the people of Israel hated

these guys. They forbade tax collectors from going to the temple as I just told you and making a sacrifice. They banned them from the synagogue and visiting any rabbi. They said they could not enter into a normal Jew's home. In fact, if a tax collector took his hand and touched your home, your home was defiled. They were *tomi*, unclean, like a leper or a prostitute. In some instances, the Jews went so far as to kill them because when the Jews would later rebel against Rome and try to kick them out of Israel in AD 70, they would be the first to die at the hands of the Zealots. Remember, one of Jesus's disciples was Simon the Zealot? You put a tax collector in your disciple group with a Zealot, the tax collector but asleep with his eyes open. I often picture my mind them sitting across the fire and Simon just sort of sharpening his knife looking at him. It's hard to describe how much they loathed tax collectors. The Jews thought there was only one good kind of tax collector and that was a dead one.

Which makes this story so bizarre because if you look back in your Bibles, verse 14, says Jesus passed by Matthew. And you would think it would say and He kept going. He didn't stop. Why would He stop? Why would anybody stop? He passes by Matthew, doing his job as a *mokhes*, that's probably what he was, fixing the rates, taxing the people, robbing them blind, and He says, "Follow Me." What does that mean? That means follow Me and be My disciple. Anytime someone wanted to learn from a man like Jesus, who traveled so much, you couldn't do it from a distance, you had to literally follow them. You had to go where they were, eat with them, sleep nearby, that sort of thing. That's what the call is here. If you were in Matthew's shoes, you would probably be saying, "Well, where are you going Jesus?" Well, the answer is anywhere. "How far?" "As far as I want?" "What will it cost?" "Everything." "How long will we be gone, Lord?" "Forever, the rest of your life." Matthew would have understood he's getting a one-way ticket here. Once he left the tax booth, there was no going back. Some of the disciples could go back to their fishing, he could never go back to this. All the money he made, all the wealth is just instantly going to disappear in his life.

And if you notice in the verse here, Matthew does it. It says that he got up and followed. He didn't wait, didn't hesitate. He just obeyed. And to be clear, Mark doesn't go into all the reasons why Matthew did this. But the implication is that it happened because Matthew heard about Jesus in the tax booth, when the people would come by and give the local gossip about a man who was healing people and telling them their sins could be forgiven. He had to be thinking maybe He can forgive my sins. Maybe He could save me. And so when the Lord offered that to him, he jumped on it.

Now let me just ask you this. What do you think the Jews would have done when they saw this? I think they would have come unglued. What do you think they would have said? They would have said, "This is scandalous. What are you doing, Jesus? You know what he did? He stabbed us in the back. He's un-Jewish, unpatriotic. The best thing you could do is send him to hell." Jesus does something else because the trouble with the Pharisee starts with this.

Listen to this. Jesus saved a scumbag here. And there's no use trying to sugarcoat that. That's what Matthew was. He was a slime ball. And you don't need to find a softer word. It fits. There's a lot of

disciples who had admirable qualities when the Lord saved them. Peter was a fisherman, so were James and John, the apostle Paul was a tentmaker, that was a good job. Matthew wasn't like that. He had a life that anyone would have despised in the first century. In fact, I spent a lot of time this week trying to find a modern equivalent of this. And it's been hard because I don't think we have anything like this right now. But that's why I talked about Jeffrey Dahmer earlier, that was the closest thing I could think of. But as I've chewed on this some more, let me just say, I think this would kind of be like if Jesus came to Canada, and picked a racist to be his disciple. Because we don't hate a lot of things in Canada. Canada is a very tolerant country, but it can't stand racism. I've been here seven years. That's the one thing I think that people just everywhere despise here. And what would it be like if the Messiah came to Chilliwack and started doing a revival among the KKK. People would go ballistic. It's the same way here.

This flies against everything they stood for as a society. Nothing about this was culturally acceptable. The Jews would have looked at this and said, "You're picking the wrong man at the wrong place at the wrong time." And I might add, Matthew might have thought that too. If you would have been in the tax booth on that day, you might have watched as Jesus approached him and said, "Follow Me." And Matthew might have looked around for a moment and said, "Who? Me?" "Yeah, you." "Why?" "Because I said, so." "Don't you have the wrong guy?" "No, I don't. I'm not picking you because you're the right guy, Matthew, I'm doing it because I want to make you a trophy of My grace." Because for the rest of his life, Matthew would have understood there's one reason why he was saved, and it was the mercy of God. Anytime someone would have seen Matthew with Jesus after this, they would have said, there's only one way to explain that relationship and that's God's power. If you notice here, Jesus doesn't tell Matthew to clean up his life before He calls him because he couldn't. Matthew couldn't go to anybody in Israel and get help, they would have all rejected him. So Jesus breaks down all social protocol, and He goes to him. That's a picture of the gospel.

How are you saved? You are saved when the Son of God came to you. How did you become a Christian? When Jesus stepped into your life, and He did it all. You couldn't get to God. There's no way. What were you going to do? Keep the law. He saved you by grace alone, just like you see right here. And already, that's a powerful story. I mean, that's enough to sort of close on and say, "Hallelujah, what a Saviour that He would do this for this man."

But I want to tell you, that was not the reaction of everyone in Israel. There were people who saw what Jesus did here and criticized Him for it. And that leads to the next stage to the trouble with the Pharisees. And that is the Pharisees concern over this. The second stage to the trouble with the Pharisees was their concern because they did not look at all of this as a positive thing. They saw what Jesus did here and said, "Well, maybe you saved someone Jesus, that's fine, but we have a problem. You didn't do it like we do." You ever been in a church where people say that? Someone gets saved, they're rough. I don't like that. You didn't do it like us. You need our permission.

Verse 15 sets the stage for this showdown essentially when it says, “It happened that after Jesus was at the tax collector's booth, He was reclining at the table in Matthew's house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Him there. Which means that after Matthew was converted, he threw a party and invited Jesus over so his friends could meet Him. And the only friends Matthew had were sinners. When you got saved, what kind of friends did you have? His tax collectors. Those were his co-workers. Luke 5:29 calls this a big reception, or literally a mega feast in Greek. I've been to some of you guys' houses before; you know how to throw a mega feast. Matthew had every type of food you can imagine there; they would have had wheat and barley. Don't invite me over if all you have is wheat and barley. Just kidding. They had olives and grapes, figs and cheese and fish because they always had fish around the Sea of Galilee. Even if you go there today, you'll have fish for breakfast, lunch and dinner; they will put fish in front of you at 8 a.m. And they would consume all of this as they reclined at a low U-shaped table close to the ground down here, where the food was placed on it. And you basically lean on the ground with your elbow on a cushion, and your right hand eating the food. You remember when they're at the Last Supper, and John puts his head on Jesus' chest? And you're kind of wondering how did he do that? Well, they're lying down almost, eating. Where everyone would talk for hours because meals like this were kind of social events. So it's not just to eat. You're doing it to visit with your friends.

And then that explains what happens next because verse 16 says that when the scribes and the Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners, and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?” And what that means is why is He socializing with these people? That's the concern. They want to know why is He treating them like friends.

And in order to explain that I've got to go back and give you some background about these guys. Because like I said, a moment ago, this is the first time you're going to see the word Pharisee in the Gospel of Mark, but they're going to come up a lot. And so you need to understand who they were because the term Pharisee, if you just want to write this down in your notes, it comes from a Hebrew word, that means separate ones. That was their goal in life. They were a group in Israel that wanted to separate themselves from anything unclean. Their theme verse for their lives was Leviticus 11:44 which says, “For I am the Lord your God, consecrate or separate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy.” The reason they made that a theme verse is because the Pharisees came into being during the intertestamental times between the Old and New Testaments when the people of Israel were being taken over by foreigners like the Romans, who tried to enforce pagan culture on them. And so the Pharisees said, “No, we're not going to do that. We're going to be *pharis* separate from that.” Which was a good thing. They had a lot of admirable qualities. The problem is they took it too far. And by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had created a whole system of rules to separate themselves from anything they thought smacked of worldliness. They separated themselves from worldly things, worldly places, and worldly people. If they thought you were worldly or unclean, the Pharisees would have nothing to do with you because they thought you might contaminate them.

In fact, the Talmud, or the rabbi's commentary in the Old Testament, recognized how crazy things had become in this regard and they said, there were seven types of Pharisees in the land of Israel, and all of them were bad, but one. There was the *shechemite* Pharisee, who will obey the law of God out of self-interest without any regard to others. Then there was the tumbling Pharisee, who was so focused on the law, he kept tumbling on the ground because he didn't see where he was going. Anybody known a Christian like that? There was the blind Pharisee, who did the same thing. There was the bleeding Pharisee who did it because he had his head so buried in a book, he would bump into a wall and bleed. There was a timid Pharisee, the "tell me another duty" Pharisee, who was always looking for another law to keep. And then there was the true Pharisee, who obeyed all the Word of God out of a desire to please Him and love His neighbor, but the Talmud said that last group was very, very rare. You saw some godly Pharisees in the New Testament, Nicodemus, the apostle Paul would get saved as a Pharisee. But most of these men fell into those other categories.

And I mention that because as I described, you can see right off the bat where these guys had an issue with tax collectors, right. They made it their ambition in life to avoid groups like this. They thought they were dirty. And so what they're wondering here is why didn't Jesus do that too. They can't figure out why He's being so nice to these people, instead of being concerned about their evil influence. So what they do in the passage here is they go and ask the disciples. They don't ask Jesus. They don't come straight to Him. They go around His back.

And their question, "why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors?" it's not really a question; it's more of an accusation. The scene Mark paints here is that of the Pharisees looking on and doing this while Jesus helps these people. They're just glaring at Him and judging. The house was probably set up in such a way where there was a courtyard outside of it. That's how most Jewish homes were, there were windows, a door was probably open maybe to let the cool breeze blow through, and they're just looking at the windows and pointing fingers at the Lord.

And before we want to point fingers at the Pharisees, let me say we've all done something like this before, haven't we? Anybody in here ever look through someone's window, another believer and judge them because they hung out with someone you did not agree with. You ever done this because they're just spending time with people you think are rough. I just had a funeral with my family. Some of those people are rough. I won't give you their names, you wouldn't believe that some of the names exist. In fact, as you read this passage, some of you might be tempted to maybe pass judgment on Jesus and say, why did He act this way? He looks like He's approving of Matthew sin. But He's not because what we can tell is Matthew is not living in sin. Now he's gotten saved, the man has been born again. And this is his clumsy way of sharing that. Matthew is raw. He doesn't know how to act as a Christian, this is all brand new. And the least the Pharisees could do is recognize that and be happy for him and show grace, but they're not. Instead, they're just throwing stones saying, "off with their head."

There's far too much of that going on in the church right now by the way. Everywhere you go, people are saying, "off with their head." Do they play drums in the church? "Off with their head." Did they read out of the wrong Bible translation? "Off with their head." Do they wear jeans and t-shirts? "Off with their head?" Do they have a beard? "Off with their head" Long hair? "Off with their head" Earrings? "Off with their head." Tattoos, contemporary music on and on and on? Let them have it. And to be fair, I think we should raise a concern about some of those things. That's right. Some of that is worldly. But the issue is, how are you supposed to do it? You go around, tearing everybody down? Is that what Jesus did? Jesus was sinless. He was the most godly person in that house, in that courtyard, in the whole world, and He showed them mercy, patience, grace. We need to learn how to do the same thing too. Listen, friends. I think the reason this is such a problem is that we do all have the heart of a Pharisee in us because we're zealous for the law. And we want to get it right. But the danger is that if you're not careful, you can take your zeal and use it as a hammer to just pulverize people when they get out of line in your own thoughts. Whenever they show up in church wearing a t-shirt and jeans, you can tell them it's a sin when the Bible doesn't say that. They didn't have t-shirts and jeans in the Bible. You say, Well, it's irreverent Pastor Jeremy. Well, talk to them about reverence. You say it's a low view of God, talk to them about a higher view of God. But you can't say it's sinful. You don't have the authority to do that.

Just like the Pharisees did not have the authority to do this. The Bible never said you can't eat with tax collectors. They just made that up. That's something they did a lot in the Bible by the way. Whenever you study the Pharisees in here, you find they were always having a problem with Jesus over this. Even though they read the Scriptures and prayed and kept the law, they just kept adding to the Bible with their man-made rules because they were so proud. They thought they were up here and everybody else is down there. And Jesus is going to tell them that they're not. They came to confront Him, but when it's all said and done, they're the ones that will be put into their place.

By the way, this needs to be balanced. Robert Guretzki did a great job last week preaching about how we need to avoid worldliness in the church and he's right because we do. But you also have to distinguish between worldliness and childishness. There are times when someone gets saved and they're just childish in the faith. They're not trying to be worldly. And our approach to that has to be very different from when someone is in sin.

And all this brings us to this final stage with the trouble with these Pharisees, and that's Jesus' answer to all this. Because at this point the line has been drawn in the sand. Jesus has saved Matthew. He's called him to be His disciple. He's gone to his house to celebrate. And the Pharisees have come on the warpath. They're going to let Him have it and the Lord cannot let that go unanswered.

So verse 17 says, "And Jesus, hearing this." Jesus had to hear this because the Pharisees didn't come tell Him face to face. So He hears this, and becoming aware that the Pharisees were grumbling behind his back, He went out of the house," probably entered that courtyard where the Pharisees were, and approaches them so He can talk to the man to man, and He says these words, look in your Bibles. "It is

not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” And you're gonna catch what He's saying here. In other words, He's telling them Do you want to know why I eat with sinners? It's because they're sick. You wondering why I spend so much time with these guys? It's because they need Me. Look at them. They're not right with God. These tax collectors are a mess. They're greedy, corrupt, dishonest, immoral, lost, worldly, materialistic. Some of them are depressed because they're so lonely. Others are dejected because nobody gives them any hope. And I'm behaving this way because I don't want to be a doctor to them. That's something that would have hit the Pharisees like a ton of bricks because they refer to themselves as doctors or physicians in their writings. And they said it was their job as Pharisees to cure the people of Israel from their uncleanness by teaching them what it meant to be set apart for God with their rules. And so Jesus is asking, how's that working for you guys? You helping anybody? What about tax collectors? You helping them? What about Matthew? Are your rules doing him any good? No, You shut him out. So I'm here to tell you My approach is entirely different from yours. I'm coming to do something else.

In your Bibles here it says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” And that's a play on words because it means I've not come to call the righteous because there aren't any. There's no righteous people in the Pharisees. There's no righteous people in Matthew's house, but the tax collectors know that. They understand they're not righteous. Everybody understands that about the tax collectors, so I'm going to spend time with them.

In fact, I'm pretty sure that some of these tax collectors had no idea what they were getting into when they showed up at this party. I mean, they probably came to talk about whatever and hang out and Jesus came talking about the gospel and telling them that no matter what a man has done, there is still hope for them if he will repent. Imagine going into a house and having dinner with Jesus. It's not going to be a casual conversation. He would tell them, you can be a lying thieving scumbag, and there's hope for you. You can be a thieving, conniving slime ball of the worst type of character, and God will still save you because salvation does not come to those who deserve it. It comes to those who don't.

The Pharisees got the whole gospel twisted. They believed salvation comes to those who deserve it, so they wanted to go to heaven the old-fashioned way. And that is by working real hard, doing all these good things, putting them on a scale and then if the good outweighs the bad, we'll be fine. They actually had a book that told them how to do this. I mentioned the Talmud earlier. The Talmud was that rabbi's commentary. It was full of information about how to keep this or that law in the Bible. And listen to this. It was 3,000 pages long, six volumes worth. And a lot of those Pharisees had major chunks of it memorized. There was one whole book about what to do on the Sabbath because that's how serious they were about climbing the ladder to heaven. And Jesus says here that's all for nothing if you will not confess your sin. There's only one type of person in this passage that's the sinner. Whether you're a tax collector or Pharisee, you have to see yourself that way and come running to Jesus for mercy.

And to be honest, if you look in verse 17, that's it. That is the end of the story here. Like a lot of stories in the Gospel of Mark, the lights just go out. Mark is the quickest of the four Gospels, he writes at a frantic pace like this. And so there's times where you're going to finish the story in Mark, and you're going to go wait, wait, what happened? Tell me what's next. And he doesn't do that here with this story. He's going to talk about the Pharisees later on, but if you want to know what happens with these guys, you can turn to other parts of the Bible like Matthew chapter 23. So if you want to turn over there in your Bibles with me to Matthew 23, you're going to see these people mentioned again because it'll tell you whether they believed or not and got the point. Matthew 23:13.

It tells us there it says, later on in the life of Christ, quite a while after this story we just talked about, it says, "But Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people, and you yourselves do not enter in." So did they get the message? No. They would not go to heaven after this because of their proud, self-righteous attitude that said they were better than everyone else. This group of people would be lost for all eternity because they would never trust in Christ as a group. There would be individual Pharisees, like I said who would get saved. We'll talk about one next week with the resurrection, Nicodemus. But in large numbers, they would reject Him completely.

Then if you look down in verse 25 of this same passage, it says, "But Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they're full of robbery and self-indulgence." Now, He accuses them of being full of sin. They spent their entire life trying to be clean from sin. All they ever did they did to avoid defilement. When they wash their hands, they're trying to avoid defilement. When they stayed away from tax collectors, they're trying to avoid defilement. Jesus says here they failed because the defilement went into the inside. I don't know about you, but I've drank from a lot of cups in my life. I'm not too concerned about the outside of it. I want the insight to be clean. The Lord says it's not the case for you. We say in Tennessee, you can put lipstick on a pig, you won't make it pretty. And you can put soap on a Pharisee, it won't change their heart.

And just so you can see this one more time verse 27. What would it be like to listen to this sermon, by the way? It's like fire coming out of His mouth. It says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs." If you were standing in certain parts of Israel, you could look and see the tombs of the prophets. And the Jews for special holidays would come and they would whitewash them. They would take white paint, put it all over the tomb, make it nice and pretty for the festival; but you wouldn't want to go in there, would you? Jesus says that's what your legalism has done for you. It's made you like a sepulchre that's beautiful on the outside, but there's nothing but death underneath. And the point is that these nice respectable religious men were headed straight for hell because they never knew what it was like to experience what Matthew did. They went to church; they didn't believe. They said their prayers; they never embraced the gospel. They read their Bibles, kept the law, followed 3,000 pages of rules and their heart wasn't in it at all.

You can do that. Did you know that? You can keep all the rules and go to hell. You can read your Bible and pray and keep law after law and be lost as a result. These guys are an example of that. To be honest, it's not the tax collectors who crucify Jesus, it's the Pharisees. It's not the men who are throwing that party and being judged who would decide to put Him on the cross, as we'll talk about on Good Friday. It's the spiritual leaders of Israel.

That leads me to say that while there were many different people in this story in the Gospel of Mark, and some of them aren't mentioned much, there's really only two you need to worry about. And that's those who were saved and those who were not, the sinners and the righteous because you have to ask yourself, which one do I belong to? Am I a Pharisee, or am I a tax collector, a saved believing tax collector?

In order to help you with that, like I did last time we were together, I want to ask you some questions to kind of flesh this out a little bit. But do you compare yourself to others when you go to church? Then you might be a Pharisee. They did that all the time. They compare themselves to others constantly. Read the prayer of the Pharisee when he's looking at the tax collector in the Gospel of Luke, and his prayer is "Thank You, God, I'm not like that guy." Also, when you come to church, do you do this and judge people? And say, "off with their heads!" Do they wear the wrong thing? "Off with their heads!" Do they say things that are a little bit wonky? "Off with their heads!" That's a Pharisee too. These guys were great at that. Judgmentalism was the motivating factor in their lives; it's what they lived for. Do you come to church to keep rules and say that I served today, check. I read my Bible, check. I fasted twice a week and tithed from my mint and cumin, check, check, check, double check. That's all-Pharisee stuff. That's the sort of thing Jesus is condemning here.

But on the flip side, do you come to church to be forgiven? That's what the tax collectors did. Are you coming in here to confess your sins and admit you've broken the law and ask God for mercy? Then you might be like Matthew. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a trophy of His grace? And when you look at your life, do you say, "I never could have come to God, if the Son of God did not come to me?" That's the kind of person Jesus is looking for in the story. Remember, who heals? He heals the sick. And who does He come to save? He comes to save those who are down here. And that's where we have to see ourselves today.

Let me pray that we would all do that, by the mercy of God.

Father, we do come to this text in the end of our sermon and pray for Your mercy. We're all so proud. I say that for myself, I say that for just everyone who has been a Christian for a long time because we forget what it's like to be like Matthew. Some of us have been serving You for years, some for decades, and throughout all those years and all that ministry, we're so grateful for what You've done, Lord, but our hearts can get so crusty about it. We look at this lost world and how wicked and evil it is, and we think that we're something else and we're not. So Lord, I pray for Your grace for our church as we take this passage and meditate on it.

Lord, our prayer is that we would not just hear these stories in the gospel and walk away unaffected, but that our lives would change as a result of this. It's unfathomable for us to think that the Son of God, the sinless perfect one, would talk to people like this and save them but that's where we all were. So Lord, I pray that in the ministries of our church, our hearts would be tinged and full of grace toward those who are on the outside. I pray that as we sing, as we worship, as we serve, as we do evangelism as we do everything, Youth ministry, children's ministry, all of this would be done with a low posture of humility.

Father, we want the lost to come to Christ. We want unbelievers to be saved, but that won't happen if we throw up our preferences and our opinions in their face. Help us not to do that, Lord, we're all guilty of it. Father, thank You for this gospel that we've studied. We've seen the mercy of Christ displayed already in so many places: the paralytic, the leper, the demon possessed man, and now this tax collector. Lord, may we have the heart of Christ? If we don't look at people the way He did, I don't know if we can call ourselves His disciples. So Lord, I pray for all of us this morning that You would convict us of our judgmentalism. It's hard Lord, this world is going insane, but You save insane people. May we never forget it. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.