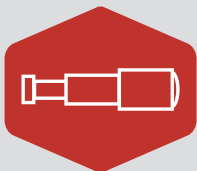




Lesson 10: Mark 2:13–17 Biggest Sinner in the City

Main Idea: In this lesson, you'll meet a man suffering from the consequences of his choices. When invited by Jesus to leave his current life for a new one, the choice he makes will change everything.

Scripture: Mark 2:13–17



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

For these verses, the setting is Capernaum. This area was ruled by the Romans, but they set three different leaders in place for overseeing the land. Capernaum was situated on a major road that went from Egypt to Syria. It was the first city on the road under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas as travelers left the territory ruled by Herod Philip. All travelers carrying dutiable goods had to stop in Capernaum to pay their taxes. Matthew worked in the customs office here, which must have been either right on the main road or within easy access to it.

When Rome conquered an area, they would look at its industry, economy, and population and then levy a tax on that area. Rome would install a governor who would be responsible for enforcing Roman law and managing litigation in that area. The governor would work with the tax collector to make sure Rome would receive the assigned taxes.

Herod the Tetrach was a petty king who was more like a monarch in Galilee. Rome allowed him to govern, and Herod made sure the taxes were collected to appease Rome and maintain his own government. In order to collect the taxes, Rome would sell franchises. If you wanted to make a lot of money and had no moral scruples, then you could bid on a franchise. Tax collector jobs were greatly sought after as a sure way to get rich quickly.¹ The one with the highest bid would be given the right to collect taxes at a certain place.

There were two types of tax collectors. One was the *gabba'im* and the other was the *mokhesim*. These two tax collectors would collect property and income tax, as well as import, export, and toll taxes. The people saw tax collectors as traitors who brutalized their own people to pacify Rome.

All three gospels tell the story in these verses. Matthew calls the tax collector Matthew. Luke and Mark call him Levi. Levi was probably his given name and Matthew (“gift of God”) his apostolic name.² He was a native of Galilee who lived in Capernaum. He was more than likely an educated man. He was ambitious and self-seeking, determined to get rich, to be successful no matter how great the cost. Levi would have been an outcast from his religion, unwelcome in the synagogue and temple because of his job and his ties with Rome. No doubt Levi heard Jesus preach, teach, and do miracles. Jesus must have seen something in Levi worth redeeming. Jesus stops at Levi’s tax booth and invites him to join Him on a discipleship pathway. Levi does not argue but simply gets up, leaving his lifework to pursue Christ. The new thing in Christianity is not the doctrine that God saves sinners. No Jew would have denied that. It is the assertion ‘that God loves and saves them as *sinner*s.’³

1 Walter W. Wessel, “Mark,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 634.

2 Walter W. Wessel, “Mark,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 634.

3 Walter W. Wessel, “Mark,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 635.

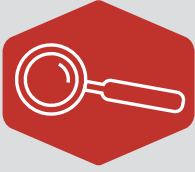


My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

Levi made a choice to be a tax collector. He probably did not realize the full consequences of this choice until he had gone too far to turn back. Then, in the eyes of the people, it was too late. Levi was forever branded. Many of us have made bad choices that have adversely affected our lives. We made those choices without full knowledge; we have suffered because of our choices. Levi teaches us that it is never too late. Jesus will accept us as we are and then change us, by His Spirit, into the person He has destined us to be. Consider these lessons from this section of Scripture:

- Our choices do not eliminate the reach of Jesus.
- Once we have an encounter with Jesus, we have a reason to share our story.
- Do not allow scorners and doubters to deny Jesus' acceptance.
- Jesus came to change the lives of people.



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
 - » Who appears in this passage?
 - » Where is this passage taking place?
 - » When is this passage occurring?
 - » Why is this passage important?
 - » What is happening in this passage?
 - » How does this passage apply to my life?

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.



Using My *FireBible*

Read the study notes for the following verse in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- Mark 2:17. Describe in your own words Jesus' call to sinners.