

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 11 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"A Heart of Grace"**

*November 19, 2017 - Mark 2:13-17*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help encourage CDOBC to have a passion for those who are lost.

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Kids can be the sweetest and most thoughtful people on the planet, but they can also be the nastiest. School playgrounds and locker rooms can be places of outrageous cruelty, where grace never makes an appearance or impact.

There can be many reasons why a kid experiences either kindness or cruelty, but often it's simply a matter of appearances - physical looks, or the clothes they wear.

A movie which was released on Friday - called "Wonder", is about a boy with *Treacher Collins Syndrome*, who for the first time enters the mainstream - attending public school in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Living in a fallen world - a world disabled and marred by sin, means life comes with great pain and great challenges - where grace has a chance to be seen by all...or where cruelty will be on full display.

How we react - how we respond in this world - with the difficulties of this world - can send an unforgettable and powerful message of love and grace.

**Interview: Joe, Tina and Logan Ramsey (10 minutes)**

*Their testimony about adopting Logan at age 3*

This morning we're going to look at a passage where Jesus gives grace and love to a person - and a group of people that society had rejected - hated. A person and a group of people that the religious people also rejected and hated.

Turn to **Mark 2** - where we will see the heart of grace that Jesus had - and the heart of grace we must emulate and cultivate.

### *Opening Prayer*

### **Jesus extends grace to Levi (Matthew) vs. 13-14**

#### **Mark 2:13-14**

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

14 And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he rose and followed Him.

It's really helpful to understand the wide shot of this scene, before we zoom in for the close-up and the dialogue we read in these verses.

When Jesus was born, Herod the Great was the Roman appointed king over Israel.

Shortly after Jesus' birth, Herod died, and the Romans divided up his kingdom among his 3 sons:

- Archelaus (Judah & Samaria)
- Antipas (Galilee and Perea)
- Philip (NE Palestine)

Each one of these new kings would have been responsible to tax the people in their territory, so they could send the money to Rome.

They had a specific amount Rome required of them - and everything above that amount they could keep for themselves.

So, they would set up a collection system, where all sorts of taxes would be collected from the people (we can relate!).

Many of the tax collection locations were like toll booths, which would require you to pay taxes as you traveled in and out of these 3 territories.

Each king would sell the rights and authority to those who wanted to be tax collectors on behalf of Rome.

Think of this as a franchise, which was probably sold to the highest bidder, and they would have exclusive rights to collect the taxes in that area.

The people hated the tax collectors, because the taxes they collected were often arbitrary and excessive. Each tax collector had to collect a certain amount of money, which they would pass up the chain, and whatever they collected in excess of this fixed amount, they could keep for themselves. (A 'mark-up' at every level)

These tax collecting booths were cash cows - gold mines!

Remember, these were taxes the Romans were demanding, and right away we see a problem in the text. “Levi” is a Jew. Levi is a Jewish name - the name of one of Jacob’s sons. It would have been a very popular name for Jewish boys. He is a Jew, who has betrayed his own country, collecting taxes on behalf of the Romans who are occupying Israel, and Levi is getting rich while his fellow Jews are suffering.

He is a traitor - a turncoat.

In **Mark 2** (Matthew 9, Luke 5), the setting is in Capernaum (Matthew 9:1, “His own city”), and fishing was a major industry in that region. It’s very likely that one of the things Levi taxed was the fisherman’s catch.

Try and understand the dynamics going on here...Jesus has just called Peter, Andrew, James and John to be His disciples - all fisherman (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). According to **John 1:35-51**, Philip and Nathanael have followed Jesus, and now Jesus was calling Levi to follow Him and be one of His disciples. (Which one of these is not like the others?)

Levi is not like the others...Levi is a tax collector! No respectable rabbi would want a tax collector as a disciple!

But Jesus was not a rabbi like all the other rabbis. Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses, but He extended grace.

It's quite possible some of the other disciples would have been very upset with Jesus calling Levi to be one of His disciples.

We don't read of their objection in the text, but this guy was a Jewish traitor - working for the Romans - getting rich on the backs of the Jewish people.

**Jesus doesn't restrict His call - His invitation - to those who are socially acceptable.**

He extends His grace to those who will accept His grace.

Too often we choose to accept, love and give grace only to those who fit some sort of profile we have approved. But Jesus invites all people - even the untouchables or unwanted to receive His grace.

**Jesus extends grace to Levi's friends vs. 15**

I can't imagine how excited Levi must have been. He certainly would have known about Jesus - maybe even heard Him teach - watched Him heal those who had various diseases or disabilities and those who were demon possessed.

In his heart, he was ready to say 'yes' to Jesus - and when Jesus said, "Follow Me", he left everything and followed Jesus. Luke says, "And leaving everything, he rose and followed Him." (5:28 - Gr. = 'to desert or abandon')

He left everything! The other 4 disciples left their fishing business - they could always go back if they wanted...but once Levi walked away from his tax collecting booth, there were others who would have pounced on that opportunity. When he left the booth, it was gone forever.

Not only did he leave everything, he threw a huge dinner party at his home to celebrate Jesus.

15 And as He reclined at table in his (Levi's) house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him.

Not only did Jesus call Levi to be one of His disciples, He hung out with Levi's friends!

Levi didn't have any friends the society would approve. No God-honoring Jew would ever associate with a tax collector. The only friends Levi could attract would be the other *unlikeables* in the culture.

The good people - the religious people - the Pharisees and those who considered themselves good because they tried to obey the Law of God, they separated themselves from all the people who weren't religious.

This great divide in the culture - the great separation of the "righteous" from the tax collectors and sinners - was a scandal Jesus was caught up in. He hung out with the tax collectors and sinners. ***This was the scandalous nature of His grace.*** In fact, one of the great scandals

of Jesus was summed up in the label the Pharisees gave Him - they said He was “A friend of sinners.” (Matt. 11:19b - full accusation was: “A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”)

“Jesus, Friend of Sinners”, by Casting Crowns

Jesus, friend of sinners  
We have strayed so far away  
We cut down people in Your name  
But the sword was never ours to swing  
Jesus, friend of sinners  
The truth's become so hard to see  
The world is on their way to You  
But they're tripping over me

Always looking around but never looking up  
I'm so double minded  
A plank-eyed saint with dirty hands  
And a heart divided

Oh Jesus, friend of sinners  
Open our eyes to the world  
At the end our pointing fingers  
Let our hearts be led by mercy  
Help us reach with open hearts and open doors  
Oh Jesus, friend of sinners  
Break our hearts for what breaks Yours

Jesus, friend of sinners  
The One whose writing in the sand  
Made the righteous turn away  
And the stones fall from their hands  
Help us to remember  
We are all the least of these

Let the memory of Your mercy  
Bring Your people to their knees

Nobody knows what we're for  
Only what we're against  
When we judge the wounded  
What if we put down our signs  
Crossed over the lines  
And loved like You did

You love every lost cause  
You reach for the outcast  
For the leper and the lame  
They're the reason that You came  
Lord, I was that lost cause  
And I was the outcast  
But You died for sinners just like me  
A grateful leper at Your feet

'Cause You are good  
You are good  
And Your love endures forever

And I was the lost cause  
And I was the outcast  
You died for sinners just like me  
A grateful leper at Your feet

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**Romans 5:6b**

“...Christ died for the ungodly.”

In our world today, one's identity is the source of much confusion.



Identity is important. The righteous - or the sinners - the ungodly? What group do you identify with?

The truth is, all of us here are sinners - the ungodly.

You might be a *saved sinner*, but you...me...we're all sinners, in need of the grace of God every day.

Will you befriend those who are far from God - those who are unlike yourself - those who society rejects and pushes to the fringes? Will you be a friend to sinners?

**Jesus came to extend grace to sinners** vs. 16-17

Jewish tradition tells us the rabbis used to say, '*You don't even go near a sinner, even so much as to teach that sinner the Law.*'

It was an "Us vs. Them" mentality.

Jesus didn't play that game.

16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that He was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to His disciples, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

I've noticed something over the years - self-righteous religious people often get their nose in other people's business. They inspect people - looking for something which is a violation of their code of ethics.

The "scribes and Pharisees" are watching Jesus, and their disapproval is growing - and they complain to His disciples. I have to wonder if this is a minor indictment of Peter, Andrew, James and John. Obviously, Levi is

in his home - hosting the dinner party. You get the sense that the disciples mentioned here are not in the house - they are outside with the Pharisees.

Could it be they were caught between two worldviews? (theirs and Jesus'?)

Were they hesitant to enter a house party with tax collectors and sinners and eat with them?

How comfortable are you with non-Christians?

Do you hesitate to build friendships with non-believers?

Does your worldview tell you to separate from all non-church people, or do you follow the example of Jesus and give grace to non-Christians?

17 And when Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

We don't exist as a church to reach other Christians.

We're here to *"reach people for Christ and to help them grow in their faith."*

We're not going to turn Christians away when they walk through the doors. Of course, we welcome those who are already followers of Christ to join our fellowship, but our passion must be the same as Jesus - to bring light to darkness - salvation to sinners - healing to the sick!

When you read the list of Jesus' disciples, there is no "Levi" on the list. That's because Levi changed his name

to Matthew. *Why did he change his name?* (Maybe Jesus changed his name?) We don't know why - we're not told why - but my guess is because he wanted a new start - a fresh start.

He's in a small town - a very prominent person in the town - a very hated person in the town.

We talked about the importance of our identity a few minutes ago - Levi wanted a new identity. He chose the name '*Matthew*' - which was a great choice, because '*Matthew*' means: *gift of the Lord*. He had been given a gift of the Lord in the grace of salvation.

### **Apply it...**

Be a grace-giver

Knowing about grace, defining grace in theological discussions is not enough - you must be grace.

Start with your own family...

Then, give grace to the non-believer...

Give grace to the person society rejects or ignores.

With wisdom, build friendships with non-believers.

Jesus loved sinners / non-religious, but He didn't approve of their sin, and He didn't practice their sin. He loved them, gave them grace, demonstrated His care for them, and talked to them about the truth.

**D.L. Moody**

*“Of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, the ninety-nine will read the Christian.”*

If non-believers are reading your life, what are they reading? Is it a message of love and grace?

Celebrate God’s grace!

There’s a theme woven in the Gospels...actually, in all of Scripture.

- O.T. - festivals which celebrated God’s goodness and deliverance.
- The prelude to Jesus’ ministry is a wedding celebration in Cana.
- The shepherd wanted to celebrate with his friends when he found his lost sheep. (Luke 15:6)
- The woman wanted to rejoice with her friends when she found her lost coin. (Luke 15:9)
- The prodigal’s father throws a huge party with food, music and dancing when his son returned home. (Luke 15:22-24)
- Jesus attends Levi’s party - with Levi’s friends.
- Throughout the Gospels we read of Jesus hanging out with people at parties.

- Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, gave a celebration party for Jesus, celebrating Lazarus' resurrection.
  - Heaven will be an eternal party - a marriage supper of the Lamb - glorious rejoicing, loud music, all of it celebrating the Father - and His Son.
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- Let's be a church of grace.
  - Let's determine to be a church which celebrates those who repent and are saved.
  - Let's determine to embrace the scandalous nature of God's grace.
  - Let's be generous with grace - and make a huge impact for eternity!!!

Close in prayer