

**The Call of Matthew (Levi)**  
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**Original: 7-16-23**

**Text:** Mark 2:13-17 (see also Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32)

**Gospel of Mark:** [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

**UBS 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Paragraph Topic:** The Calling of Levi

**Central Idea of Message:** Jesus associates with sinners. It is a good idea for each of us to consider ourselves a sick patient in need of the Great Physician.

**Introduction:** Jesus associates with sinners because Jesus came to save sinners. It is a good idea for each of us to consider ourselves a sick patient in need of the Great Physician. This is part of what we see in the command to follow him which Jesus issued to Levi.

**I. Jesus Calls Levi (vv. 13-14)**

- A. Jesus went out again by the seashore (v. 13)
  - 1. Probably the Sea of Galilee, since Capernaum was on its northern shore
  - 2. A multitude of people were coming to him
    - a) To be healed?
    - b) To see a miracle?
    - c) To find cause to be offended?
    - d) Just curious?
    - e) To hear about God's kingdom and how to enter into it?
  - 3. Jesus was teaching them
    - a) **The ministry of Jesus was mostly one of teaching, meaning communication primarily directed at the intellect of the listeners**
    - b) This is not to imply that he never preached, meaning communication primarily directed at the emotions of the listeners
- B. Jesus sees Levi (v. 14)
  - 1. As Jesus is passing by
  - 2. **Levi, the son of Alphaeus, is also called Matthew (Matt. 9:9; 10:3)**
  - 3. Sitting in the tax office
    - a) IRS agent!
    - b) Tax collector is synonymous with publican

- c) Despised position for a Jew to hold
- d) Many had paid large sums of money to hold the office and they also extorted the people paying the taxes
- e) They were hated for collaborating with the Romans
- f) "Tax collectors were usually greedy, dishonest and immoral" (Cole 954)
- g) **To be a tax collector in Jesus' day was on the level of being a prostitute, because both were social outcasts and considered hopeless cases**

- (1) He collected taxes for Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee (cf. Robertson 1:270; Wuest 1:51)
- (2) "Here was a Jew who loved money more than the good regard of and fellowship with his countrymen" (Wuest 1:51)
- (3) Tax collectors "wanted money more than they wanted God" (Brown 30)
- (4) He would have been disfellowshipped [excommunicated] from attending any synagogue
- (5) What a strange "draft pick"!
  - (a) **Jesus often picks people for tasks whom nobody else would consider**
  - (b) **Jesus looks beyond who and what someone currently is and sees who and what someone can become**
  - (c) **This same man, Levi, would become one of the twelve apostles, get a name change to Matthew [gift of God], and would become the author of *The Gospel of Matthew!***

- C. Jesus calls Levi (v. 14)
  - 1. Jesus simply says to Levi, "Follow me!"
    - a) Imperative
    - b) Recognized the authority of the commander!
  - 2. Levi rose and followed him
    - a) Levi quit his job, and Luke, not Matthew himself, even states that, "He left everything behind" (Luke 5:28)
    - b) **Levi [Matthew] was willing to give up affluence and luxury to follow Jesus**
      - (1) But he got "clean hands" (Barclay 62)

- (2) "He lost one job but he got a far bigger one" (Barclay 62)
- (3) He gained "worldwide fame" (Barclay 63)
- c) **Following Jesus may require giving up certain occupations and leaving the old way of life behind** [Andy and trucking]
- d) **To follow Jesus entails walking the road of self-sacrifice, suffering, truthfulness, loyalty, and holiness**

## II. The Dinner at the Home of Levi (vv. 15-17)

- A. Jesus in the home of Levi (v. 15)
  - 1. Levi must have taken Jesus to his own home
  - 2. Jesus was in Levi's recliner at the table
  - 3. There was a dinner where many were gathered
    - a) Many tax gatherers
    - b) Sinners, or at least considered by pious Jews to be sinful
    - c) Jesus
    - d) The disciples of Jesus, at least four, but likely many others as well
  - 4. Levi must have been well off financially to be able to host such a dinner and did so in order for his associates to meet Jesus
- B. The criticism (v. 16)
  - 1. The scribes of the Pharisees
    - a) Professional copyists
    - b) Gatekeepers of theological orthodoxy
    - c) Very legalistic, adhering to the letter of the Mosaic law and to oral tradition
  - 2. The scribes questioned why Jesus would eat and drink with tax gatherers and sinners, criticizing him for not *separating* himself from those who did not observe Mosaic law as strictly as them
    - a) The word *Pharisee* means separated!
    - b) Their traditions represented a "spiritual straight jacket" (Luccock 674)
    - c) **Christians are called upon to be in the world but not of it**
    - d) **Becoming all things to all people does not mean participating with them in their sin but meeting them where they are in order to hand deliver to them the gospel of God's grace**
- C. Jesus' answer (v. 17)
  - 1. Jesus heard the complaints of the scribes

2. His response is classic
  - a) Those who are healthy do not need a physician
  - b) Only those who are sick need a physician
  - c) He did not come to call the righteous
  - d) He only came to call sinners
  - e) It is as if Jesus might be saying, "If you are not a sinner, then I am not talking to you"
  - f) But they were sinners - all of them
3. The implications of Jesus' response
  - a) **Nobody, including the Pharisees and their scribes, gets to decide who gets attention from Jesus**
  - b) **Nobody is spiritually healthy, including the scribal theologians**
  - c) **Everybody is spiritually sick**
  - d) **Nobody is righteous enough to enter God's kingdom on their own and if you think you are righteous, you are wrong and only self-righteous!**
  - e) **Jesus came to call everybody to repent of sin and believe in him and his gospel of the kingdom**
  - f) **Jesus can do nothing for those who think that they do not need anything done for them**
  - g) **Jesus can do everything for those who know that they need something done for them**
  - h) **If you are spiritually sick, Jesus is the cure!**

**Conclusion:** Why was Jesus at such a party and in such company? Certainly not to participate with them in any of their sinful activities. **Jesus was deliberately associating with sinners in order to preach repentance and the gospel of the kingdom to them to save their souls. It is a good idea for each of us to consider ourselves a sick patient in need of the Great Physician.** Are you willing to acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of Jesus' gospel of grace?