

THE DISGRACE OF THE GOSPEL

Mk. 2:13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the [*son*] of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. ¹⁵ And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. ¹⁶ And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? ¹⁷ When Jesus heard [*it*], he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

When I was growing up one of the descriptions people used when referring to Christians was “good living” ... So-and-so is “good living”, - they go to church they carry their Bibles, they talk about Jesus ... and generally, that was their life ... they were *good living*. They were different from everyone else ...

... What if Jesus had chosen to delay His incarnation until 2014? What if He hadn't been born 2000 years ago, but came to live amongst us today? His purpose in coming would have been exactly the same, - to be a sacrifice for sin. Today, though, - if He was here, - He would be rejected because He would be seen as being far too stringent, too holy, too righteous, too over-demanding, too ridiculously legalistic, far too condemnatory, ludicrously intolerant, foolishly judgmental, and not-at-all part of the religious lifestyle many accept as the norm ... If Jesus was alive in 2014, He would be far too *holy*!

However, the problem He faced when He *did* actually come two thousand years ago was that He was not holy enough! ... He did not measure up to the standards expected by the Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees. ... He was not holy enough, righteous enough, legalistic enough, and demanding enough. In fact, He wasn't condemning enough, 'separatistic' enough, and intolerant enough! ... That was why they hated Him, - because He didn't fit ... He wasn't holy enough, ... and yet, they would hate Him today because He is too holy. Either way, He draws rejection, animosity, contempt and hostility!

The Jewish leaders hated Him for forgiving bad people, - such as Zacchaeus and Mary Magdalene. In fact, - not to put too fine a point on it, - they considered Him as being the spawn of Satan, ... what He did He did by the power of Beelzebub, and He was doing the devil's work! They reckoned He was energised from Hell itself! They spared the worst of insults for Him, Lk. 7:34 The Son of man is ... a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! ... He cannot possibly be the Messiah because He was often among the worst of people and, therefore, it shows His low standard of righteousness, - far lower than any good and decent Pharisee would contemplate. No, He cannot be the Messiah!

They, of course, were on a far higher spiritual plain than Jesus. In fact, where He was and where they were was poles apart! ... And since they were righteous, the only conclusion they could come up with was He was *unrighteous*! For example, on one occasion (Lk. 7:36ff.) Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee for a meal. However, when He was at the Pharisee's table, a woman, - a sinner, by implication a prostitute, - came to Him weeping, and she wiped His feet with her tears, and then kissed them, and anointed them with perfume! Now what kind of a Messiah would have allowed that?! ... when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner (Lk. 7:39).

This was the kind of thing that condemned Jesus in the eyes of the Pharisees. Even if they wanted to, - and they didn't, - they could see nothing about Him that related to the holiness and separation they espoused ... the kind that was spoken about in Jesus' parable in reference to the Pharisee who stood up in the temple and prayed, Lk. 18:11 God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men [*are*], extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

And so this was *the scandal* of Christ's earthly ministry, - He was the Friend of sinners and the Enemy of righteous upstanding Pharisees ... and that was how they saw it! Of course, however, that is the beauty of the Gospel, ... it is *particular* - He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mk. 2:17) ... For the sinners, He came to give His life a ransom (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45) and to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins (Rom. 3:25). ... And Jesus didn't come to save everybody! He didn't come to save good people who refuse to have any acceptance of their sin. Instead, He came to save people who *knew* the awfulness of their sin and who, - by His irresistible grace, - would turn to Him and be saved ... when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6)!

And the reason the Pharisees rejected Him was because they reckoned they had no need of what Jesus was offering because they were well-capable of earning their own salvation, ... by being good enough, righteous enough, holy enough ... in fact, so-much-so they *deserved* their salvation!

That's really the background to what was happening here in these verses. So let's read the passage again, Mk. 2:13 And he [*Jesus*] went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the [*son*] of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he

arose and followed him. ¹⁵ And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. ¹⁶ And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? ¹⁷ When Jesus heard [it], he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. ...

That is the unadulterated message of the Gospel, - Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost! The only people Christ died for on the cross of Calvary were such people! The only people who will enter Heaven ... the only people who are acceptable to God ... and the only people who are granted salvation are those who have come to a full knowledge of their sins, a knowledge that brings them onto their knees, crying out, Lord, what must I do to be saved?!

... And the answer? It is the same today as it has always been, for the Gospel never changes, [Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved](#) ... There is no other way! Salvation from sin comes as the result of believing in Jesus Christ to save you! No matter what language you preach it in ... or the audience to which it is preached ... it is the same Gospel for it is the *only* Gospel that saves! It is concentrated upon those who know they are sinners and who confess their sin, and who turn to Jesus seeking His forgiveness. ... That is the people for whom Christ has died!

But that wasn't how the Jewish leaders and the Pharisees saw it. To understand a little clearer, imagine going into some lavish and ornate cathedral with all its memorials to great men of former days, and standing in the pulpit and hearing this Gospel being preached ... It would never happen!! It would be an outrage to call upon the leaders of our country to kneel before God in repentance for the laws contrary to Scripture they have passed through their parliaments! Imagine calling for the religious men and women in their religious garb to fall before God and renounce their sin of apostasy ... That's how it would have been seen by these Pharisees in Jesus' time ... and they *hated* Him for it!

We read that He went forth again (Mk. 2:13), - i.e. He went out of Peter and Andrew's house in Capernaum where He had healed the paralytic, - and He went down by the seashore ... and He stood on the stones of the Sea of Galilee preaching (v.13). What would He have been preaching? Mark tells us He was [preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.](#) (Mk. 1:14,15).

Then, He moved on a little further, - v.14 And as he passed by [*walked along*], - He had finished preaching for the time-being. And then He did something that would have horrified many. He stopped with a particular man called Levi ... a tax collector, - a 'fiddler', a 'man who would take the two eyes out of your head and come back for the sockets', a man who 'feathered his own nest' working for the Romans and exploiting hard-earned money from his own people! He and those like him were detestable ... They were barred from synagogues, and from testifying in courts. They were at the centre of every type of 'low-life' crime ... That was the ilk of this man! ...

And lo and behold, Jesus said to him, *Follow me. And he arose and followed him.* ... No genuine self-respecting Messiah would have even contemplated speaking to such a man! However, Jesus did. ... This man, - this tax-collector, this 'worst of the worst', this 'dreg' of society, - ... that was who Jesus called to be one of His disciples! ... This man Levi was a Jew, - he is named after one of Jacob's sons by Leah, and yet he has treated his ancient Hebrew legacy with scorn for he had sold his soul to the Romans for financial gain!

Nevertheless, Jesus called him. By the way, this is Matthew, - Levi was his Hebrew name, and Matthew was his Gentile name, - they were the same person! When Jesus called him, he got up from his desk, left the money he had fiddled from his country-people, and followed Jesus ... and something else ... it wasn't the kind of job you could go back to after having walked away from because the other taxmen would have swooped in like vultures and taken over all his business! Luke describes how 5:28 *he left all, rose up, and followed [Jesus]*. There was no return. He abandoned his old lifestyle. He walked away from it. He left it behind! He had been a 'man of the world'. He hadn't cared about religion previously, or his place in society, or friendships, prestige, honour or anything decent ... all he cared about was money ... But when Jesus called him, his life was turned around ... it took a complete change! The old things immediately passed away, and all things had become new for he had become a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17)!

He had nothing to go back to, - he had given it up to follow Jesus! ... That was the kind of person *Jesus* called, and Jesus knew exactly who Levi was and what he was, and yet He told him, *Follow me*. And in that very moment, everything Levi had previously considered precious no longer had any meaning for him. That which had controlled his life, he left behind, and walked away from!

He lost his friends, - such as they were. He lost his lucrative employment. He lost the basis for a comfortable future. He lost his career and his material possessions ... but what did he gain? He gained a place in the Saviour's heart. He gained eternal glory. He gained Heaven and its inheritance. He knew what all those Jewish leaders did not know for he knew Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He knew that this Jesus of Nazareth had come to bring him salvation!

In turn, Levi brought Jesus to his home, and he sat down before the Saviour what would have been a most beautiful and extravagant meal. He had invited the Saviour to sit at his table ... and there Jesus was ... [v.15 many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many](#). What a gathering this would have been! Levi was thrilled with what the Lord had done for him, and he wanted his former 'workmates' to know all about the Saviour. In this most lavish feast, he honoured Jesus ... The Saviour spoke of the good news of the Kingdom. He didn't waste the opportunity and as a consequence the many who were at the feast [followed him](#) also.

Did they all believe as Levi believed? ... Why not? If Christ can save one tax-collector, He can save them all! ... In the same way, if Christ can save one drunkard, or one thief, or one murderer, He can save as many as He chooses! God's grace has no limits placed upon it by man ... and He can save from the uttermost to the 'guttermost'! ... Jesus preaching the Gospel, and Levi telling his testimony, - what a meal that would have been! There was a mighty work of God's grace going on there, and souls were being saved! In just the same way as Levi followed Jesus, many of his associates did also.

All wasn't well though. The scribes and the Pharisees didn't like what they were seeing. How can this Jesus sit eating and drinking with these 'low-lives'?! He cannot be who He claims to be! They could not believe it! ... There is no way this Jesus of Nazareth could be the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord of Heaven ... No way could He be the Saviour, - there was virtually no difference between Him and the sinners. Words could not describe how much they despised Jesus.

Here they were ... the cream of morality and righteousness beholding the spectacle of a Man Who claimed to be Messiah eating and drinking in the presence of the basest members of society. So, true to their religion, the Pharisees had to register their outrage, and they did it in an underhand way by directing their words to Jesus' disciples. Perhaps they might be able to introduce some doubt into their minds so as to stop others joining Jesus' band.

However, Jesus overheard what they were saying, and He condemned them, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

He spoke simply, - He didn't use complicated language. He told the Pharisees it wasn't those who were healthy who need the doctor, it was the sick. In other words, Jesus was presenting Himself as the spiritual Physician, and the people sitting at the table with Him as being spiritually ill ... *Those* were the people who needed Him for the healing of the soul, salvation. On the other hand, the Pharisees wouldn't recognise their need of such healing, - they rejected Jesus. That was their decision, - Jesus hadn't come for them! ... And it is true that only sinners touched by God's grace come to Christ ... It's not righteous people for to them God's grace is unknown and unnecessary, - and so, it's not the self-righteous Jesus came to call, it is [the sinners to repentance](#).

Now, Jesus didn't see the Pharisees as righteous, but He was using the analogy for the sake of the moment regarding their own estimate of themselves ... for as far as they were concerned they were righteous, and everyone else wasn't! And Jesus told them, I didn't come for you ... and as long as you continue to think you are good enough, you will die in your sins and you will never come to where I'm going. You say you don't need Me, and there is nothing of Me you want. Well, that's your decision ... It is not you, then, I have come for ... for I have come to call the sinners to repentance. ... How those scribes and Pharisees must have despised/loathed Jesus! The hatred must have been bubbling inside them!

They were so far from God ... and yet, in His wonderful and marvellous free and sovereign grace, - even some of their kind would not remain strangers to this grace for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and Saul of Tarsus would eventually be saved ... And also in Acts 6:7, - after the many opportunities of preaching the Gospel following the Day of Pentecost, - [the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith](#). God's grace at work in salvation could not be hindered, not even among the religious elite!

Today, in this place and in many faithful churches throughout the land, God has redeemed a precious people ... not because of the good or the bad in them, but because He has chosen them ... according to His gracious mercy. No matter how much sin abounds in any part of this world today, grace much more abounds for God saves from out of the very best of society to the very worst.

There is no obstacle to His salvation. He saves who He chooses, and no barriers the enemy erects can hinder His work. The people He saves neither deserve it or work for it ... they simply and humbly believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to free them from their sin, and to remove the penalty of their sins completely ... and it is a work He does not just for time but also for eternity.

The people He saves are people who realise they need His salvation. And it is not merely a matter of measuring what constitutes wickedness in the world's terms, - and according to the world's definitions, - ... because what God calls sin and wickedness is often not recognised by the world as being such. But those upon whom the Holy Spirit of God is working to bring about their salvation comes face-to-face with the reality of knowing how far they have gone away from God ... and it is only Him Who can clothe them in the righteousness that makes us fit for Heaven. Only Christ forgives, for eternal salvation is through Him alone.

Yes, there are religions and churches without a Saviour, - that's the category into which these scribes and Pharisees belonged. They have no need of the Gospel. They will be like Ignorance, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, when he arrived at the gate expecting automatic entrance into the Celestial City, "I have ate and drank in the presence of the King and He has taught in our streets". It will not have been no good though, for it is to the religious the Lord the Judge will say, [Mt. 7:23 I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.](#)

You see, it's only God's grace you can rely upon to save you ... nothing else. There is only one Gospel that makes the message clear, and that is the Gospel that Jesus Christ died to save sinners. I trust that is the Gospel you are relying upon ... and if it is not *yet* ... our prayer is that you will turn to the Saviour in repentance and believe in Him to cleanse you from your sin. Amen.