



Mark 1 & 2 - January 2024

Introduction



Mark 2: 13-17 Jesus Friend of Sinners

(sermons: Feb 4)

Mark 2: 13-17

- v.14 *Levi – ‘Levi, son of Alphaeus’ in Mark and Luke; ‘Matthew’ in his account of the same incident*
- v.14 *tax-collector’s booth – tax- or toll-collectors were often hated as cheats (taking too much; they were entitled to some income on top of what they had to hand on to the Romans) or traitors (seen as collaborating with the occupying Romans, even if they worked for one of the half-Jewish puppet-rulers of the Herod family). Levi was probably collecting tolls on goods as Capernaum was on a trade-route.*
- v.15 *sinners – the earlier version of the NIV translation has quotation marks round ‘sinners’; this is to suggest that the Pharisees saw Levi’s guests as ‘sinners’, rather than this necessarily being a fair description of them. But Jesus’s point is even clearer if these other guests had broken God’s law in some way, even if it was only the food and washing regulations that the Pharisees were so proud that they kept – and then looked down on those who didn’t know the law so well.*
- v.16 *teachers of the law – those who explained the ‘Law of Moses’, the first 5 books of the Old Testament and applied it to questions of everyday life. Some teachers of the law were also Pharisees.*
- v.16 *who were Pharisees – The Pharisees, meaning the ‘separate ones’, were a Jewish pressure-group, made up of both priests and laymen, who emphasized keeping God’s Law in the hope that, if they were pure enough, the nation would become independent again; they opposed any compromise with Greek & Roman pagan practices; they wanted to prepare for the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God (which they saw as in the age to come, and for obedient Jews only).*
- v.17 *I have not come to call the righteous – Is Jesus implying that some people do not need him? Or is there some irony in his voice: this is how the Pharisees saw themselves, but they were self-righteous rather than truly righteous in God’s sight.*
1. Put yourself in Levi’s place. How would his life have been going: financially? socially? How would he have felt when Jesus called him? How do you know?
 2. How would Levi have been making a more complete break with his past than the fishermen Simon & Andrew, James & John? Why, do you think, did he invite his dubious friends to dinner with Jesus?
 3. What was the reason for the Pharisees’ and other religious teachers’ complaint? Was their criticism of Levi and his friends justified? What had they left out of their thinking? Why?
 4. Try to put Jesus’ reply (v.17) in your own words, with a different illustration than doctors & patients. What does it tell us about Jesus’s priorities and about how he saw people? When do we need to apply Jesus’ words to ourselves, and to our attitude to other people? When can we be like the Pharisees, failing to see our own need for forgiveness and transformation? What *did* Jesus want from Levi and his friends, even if he didn’t condemn them as the Pharisees did?
 5. Does this incident say something to us as a church, about our priorities, and whose needs we consider? Are there some groups of people that we don’t have any contact with? Why? Do you agree with Archbishop William Temple’s famous saying that: ‘The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.’