**Jesus Called Sinners to Repent**

**by Pastor Fee Soliven**

**Mark 2:13-17**

**Wednesday Evening**

**August 29, 2018**

**13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.**

Saints, Jesus left Capernaum and went back to the lakeshore (that is, the Sea of Galilee). A crowd of people gathered, and Jesus taught them. While Jesus often spoke in synagogues or homes, he also taught groups of people on hillsides or on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The hillsides and sloping shoreline of the Sea of Galilee provided a convenient place for large crowds to gather and listen.

**Matthew 5:1-12**

1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Beatitudes describe how Christ’s followers should live. Each beatitude tells how to be blessed. To be blessed means more than happiness; it means to be favored and approved by God. According to worldly standards, the types of people whom Jesus described don’t seem to be particularly blessed by God.

But God’s way of living usually contradicts the world’s. Jesus explained that “God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.” Only those who humbly depend on God are admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven. The final consummation of all these rewards, and of the Kingdom itself, lies in the future. However, believers can already share in the Kingdom (as far as it has been revealed) by living out Jesus’ words.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Whether Jesus’ followers mourn for sin or in suffering, God’s promise is sure that they will be comforted. Only God can take away sorrow for sin; only God can forgive and erase it. Only God can give comfort to those who suffer for his sake because they know their reward in the Kingdom.

5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

“God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them.” The words translated gentle and lowly convey humility and trust in God. Gentle and lowly people do not look down on themselves, but they do not think too highly of themselves either. Ironically, it will not be the arrogant and wealthy people who get everything.

Instead, the whole earth will belong to the gentle. Jesus used “earth” to refer to the future inheritance of the Kingdom. According to Revelation 21–22, believers will enjoy a new heaven and a new earth. God will one day freely give his true disciples what they did not grasp for themselves on earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

“God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for they will receive it in full.”

The words hungry and thirsty picture intense longings that people desire to satisfy—necessities that they cannot live without. Those who have an intense longing for justice (righteousness) are blessed. Most likely, this refers to personal justice—being so filled with God that the person completely does God’s will.

Justice refers to total discipleship and complete obedience. It may also refer to justice for the entire world—an end to the sin and evil that fill it. In both cases, God’s promise is sure; they will receive it in full. He will completely satisfy spiritual hunger and thirst.

 7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.” People characterized as pure in heart are morally pure, honest, and sincere. They are people of integrity and single-minded commitment to God.

Because of their sincere devotion to Christ, they will see God here and now through the eyes of faith (Hebrews 11:27), and finally face-to-face (1 John 3:2).

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.” God calls his children to be peacemakers. This involves action, not just passive compliance. Peacemakers actively work for peace, to cause reconciliation, to end bitterness and strife.

This peace is not appeasement but dealing with and solving problems to maintain peace. Arrogant, selfish people do not concern themselves with peacemaking. Peacemakers will be called the children of God because they reflect their Father’s character.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“God blesses those who are persecuted because they live for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” Persecution should not surprise Christians. People who put others before themselves will seldom receive applause and honors.

Often, they will be persecuted instead. Because they live for God, they stand out from the world and become marks for enemy attacks. The world is under Satan’s control, and believers belong to the opposing army. The reward for these believers will be the Kingdom of Heaven. God will make up for the suffering that his children have undergone because of their loyalty to him.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

“God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers.” Jesus was telling his disciples that they shouldn’t be surprised when people mock them, persecute them, and lie about them. Jesus would face such treatment. Later, he explained to his followers that they should expect nothing different (10:18; 24:9; John 15:20).

12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus described the way the disciples should respond to persecution: “Be happy about it! Be very glad!” This refers to deep, spiritual joy that is unhindered and unchanged by what happens in this present life. A person with righteous character can rejoice and be glad because of the promise: a great reward awaits you in heaven. The persecution will pale in comparison to the great reward.

Besides that, the disciples had good company: the ancient prophets were persecuted, too. Jesus placed his disciples in a long line of God’s followers who lived righteously and spoke truthfully—only to suffer for it. Jesus explained that to live and speak for God in the face of unjust persecution, as the ancient prophets did, would bring great reward in heaven.

**14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.**

Saints, Levi (also called Matthew, and later the author of the Gospel of Matthew) was a Jew who worked for the Romans (specifically for Herod Antipas) as the area’s tax collector. He collected taxes from the citizens as well as from merchants passing through town.

(Capernaum was a customs post on the caravan route between Damascus to the northeast and the Mediterranean Sea to the west.) Tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected, but most of them overcharged and kept the profits. Thus, tax collectors were hated by most Jews because of their reputation for cheating and because of their support of Rome.

A Jew who accepted such an office was excommunicated from the synagogue and shamed his family and friends. Thus, a Jewish tax collector was looked down upon for valuing money over reputation, respectability, purity before God, and concern for his own people, who had to pay extremely high taxes to the imperial power.

The tax-collection booth was an elevated platform or bench. Everyone knew who Levi was, and anyone passing through the city who had to pay taxes could find him easily. Levi’s tollbooth taxed commercial goods being transported from the sea to land routes. This was probably not the first time Jesus saw Levi, for Jesus walked these shores many times.

Mark’s words emphasize the brevity of Jesus’ call and Levi’s radical obedience. Jesus’ words, “Come, be my disciple,” are in the imperative mood, meaning this was a command, not an invitation. Levi recognized that Jesus wasn’t inviting him; Jesus was calling him. So Levi got up and followed.

Levi’s radical obedience is amazing for the change it would effect in his life. Already ostracized by family and friends, following Jesus probably made no difference in this regard. But Levi was probably very wealthy—tax collecting was a lucrative occupation. Levi had been an outcast; now he was wanted as a member of a group. But he would have to learn to live in poverty.

**15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.**

Saints, Levi responded, as Jesus would want all his followers to do; he followed his Lord immediately, and he called his friends together to meet him too. He held a dinner for his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners so they also could meet Jesus.

In Levi’s house there gathered a crowd that Jesus could not reach in the synagogues. The tax collectors had been excommunicated. The term sinners referred to the common people who were not learned in the law and did not abide by the rigid standards of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees regarded these people as wicked and opposed to the will of God because they did not observe the rituals for purity, which enabled them to eat with others. In any case, Jesus had attracted a following among these people. These people gathered at Levi’s house, where they knew they had a welcome, and they too sat with Jesus and his disciples at dinner and listened to the message this marvelous teacher had for them.

**16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"**

Saints, many of these teachers of religious law were also Pharisees—a strict religious group of Jews who also advocated minute obedience to the Jewish laws and traditions. Their job was to teach the Scriptures and the Law and to protect them against anyone’s willful defiance.

They saw themselves as righteous and everyone else as sinners. When Jesus sat down to a meal with these “scum,” the Pharisees were quite surprised.

Here was a man who seemed to have the entire law at his fingertips, who taught with great authority, yet who stooped to the level of the poor, unlearned, common people (even sinners!). Thus the Pharisees pulled his disciples aside and asked why Jesus did this.

**Matthew 23:25-39**

25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' 31 "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

**17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."**

Saints, the question apparently made its way to Jesus’ ears, and Jesus had an answer for the self-righteous, influential religious leaders. The first part of Jesus’ answer was from a common proverb on the healthy and the sick. People who are well don’t seek out a physician; the physician’s waiting room is filled with people who are sick. They recognize their need and come to the one who can make them well.

Jesus carried the proverb a step further and explained his messianic mission. Jesus did not come to call those who think they are already good enough (used ironically—those, like these Pharisees, who thought they were righteous) to repentance, for the self-righteous did not recognize their sinfulness. But these sinners saw their need. This was Jesus’ audience.

**John 3:17-21**

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

**Let’s Pray Benediction**

**"May The LORD bless you and keep you, May The LORD make His face shine upon you, May The LORD be gracious to you, May The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you His (Shalom) peace.” In Jesus Name!**