

THE PHARISEE IN ME

Please read with me **Mark 2:13-17**:

¹³Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.

¹⁴As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

¹⁷On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

At this point in Jesus' early ministry Jesus still speaks in a Synagogue on occasion, but the crowds are becoming so large that outdoor meetings are more practical. Besides, He is ministering daily. Often it is on the Sabbath that Jesus addresses congregants in a Synagogue.

Surprisingly early in Jesus' ministry there is an organized, official and growing resistance movement against Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees and as we will see – by the Herodians.

This may also be a contributing factor to Jesus operating outside and outdoors more of the time.

It is doubtful that Jesus would find Levi in a Synagogue anyway.

Levi, who became better known as Matthew, is one of the despised Publicans.

Even in his own gospel Matthew would later declare that he is "*Matthew the tax collector.*" He belonged to the class of bureaucrats serving under the "publicani," the officers who manned concessions where you go to pay your taxes, whether you are a Jewish citizen, or a foreign traveler paying fees of some sort. These taxes are imposed by Rome under the tetrarchy of Galilee led by the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas. Levi is probably also a Levite with a name like 'Levi.' So here is a member of the priestly tribe, with ancestors like Moses and Aaron, working as a hired hand for the Roman oppressors.

The Jews Never Adapted to Roman Rule

The Jews regarded Rome somewhat like the European Jews of the 1930's and 40's regarded the Nazis.

The Romans didn't totally understand the discontent of the Israelis. Sure, it wasn't fun to be conquered by Rome, but to be dominated by Rome wasn't so bad. You benefited from 'Pax Romana,' the 'Roman Peace' that protected you from all of your traditional enemies in the region – not totally unlike it was under Tito in Yugoslavia for 50 years or so. It wasn't until Tito died that the Serbs and the Croats were back at each

others' throats again. Roman built good roads and terrific aqueducts for providing drinking water, not to mention the entertainments at the Colosseum in Jerusalem and a logically ordered life.

But the Jews had gotten a taste for freedom after the Exodus from Egypt, which they reviewed every Passover, and which is still with them to this day.

Levi would, therefore, be to them a "Mashumed," a traitor. In addition to that, many if not most tax collectors became quite well off from over-charging their fellow Jews and skimming excess tax revenues for themselves.

Remember how wealthy Zacheus the tax collector was and how dishonest he had been. When he experienced salvation he proclaimed that he would pay back out of the 'four fold,' which revealed his changed heart as well as his bankroll.

We don't know how dishonest Levi has been, but he does seem well off because he throws a large dinner party for all his tax collector friends to honor his new Master, the Teacher and Healer of Nazareth. *Mark 2:15 & 16:*

¹⁵While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Since the watchful Pharisees refer to Matthew guests as "sinners" and tax collectors, we know the party was for people in the same ostracized strata of Jewish society who, though hated, at least had each other.

Apart from his station in life Matthew definitely has some pluses as well some minuses. On the positive side Matthew, in order to do his work, would be acquainted with not only the common Aramaic, but Greek and Latin, with a smattering of vocabulary words from Persia and the languages of the other countries where Jews of the dispersion came through from for the Holy Days. Matthew/Levi could do computations and as we all know he was a skilled writer. It is Matthew who gives us the intriguing story of the wise men and the escape to Egypt of Jesus (and Joseph and Mary) in his infancy. Plus, it is Matthew's Gospel that is specifically designed for Jewish readers with its continual references to the prophecies of the Old Testament.

In fact, Matthew may have been the best educated of the twelve Apostles, not counting the apostleship of Paul, who came later.

Levi is celebrating his selection as a disciple of Jesus

- yes, even as an Apostle – and in his joy he wants his compatriots to come and meet Jesus for themselves.

One good thing about people recently delivered from a life of sin is that they often have a lot of unsaved friends to introduce to Christ!

Levi seems like an extrovert to me, and his life of service, which we will convey to you in one way or another, suggests to me that he is of a choleric or driver temperament. You will be impressed at the far-flung places Matthew eventually traveled to spread the Gospel; but for now he is a renegade Jew who has somehow

ingratiated himself to this renegade teacher, the Rabbi from despised Nazareth.

The Scribes and Pharisees who dog Jesus' every move are, of course, crowding around Levi's house, possibly standing in the courtyard trampling his garden flowers and herbs, trying to see and hear as much as they can.

They observe the flow of publicans and other sinners, whom we can only image, whether male or female, filing into Levi's house. The Pharisees hear the sounds of laughter and camaraderie as they steal glimpses of the people inside, and of Jesus Who is not acting superior and Who is not showing contempt for the unsavory gathering. And yes, there He goes, Jesus is doing it! He is actually eating their food with them! Eating Kosher involved many correct choices and had the effect of separating Jews from Gentiles and Kosher Jews from non-Kosher Jews.

In fact, as we shall deduce, Jesus is violating their many, extra-biblical culinary laws! But Jesus doesn't seem to be concerned, and with smiles, and possibly even with appropriate laughter, He seems to be fitting right in as if He were their friend.

This is, of course, outrageous to the Pharisees who are strict separatists. And we New Testament Christians are also taught to separate ourselves unto God and from uncleanness but these pious Pharisees have missed something important.

To them, Jesus is making mistakes. He is breaking *their* rules and perhaps some of their rules are extra-biblical and man-made, but Jesus has gone to far! This scene is just too much!

This is "moral carelessness"!

How can a righteous man or a great moral teacher or *especially* a possible candidate for being the promised Messiah, as some suggest, eat-with-sinners?

So, when two or three disciples step outside for a little fresh air the Pharisees ask them, "*Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?*" Even as they pose this question with righteous indignation Jesus, unexpectedly walks up behind them *Mark 2:17*:

¹⁷On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In a real way Jesus agrees with the Pharisees. In His statement to the Pharisees, Jesus admits that the den of tax-collectors and their sinful associates inside *are* morally and spiritually diseased.

Jesus is saying, "Yes, I understand and agree with you and your diagnosis that these people I am eating with are sick and vile, and unclean and contagious." [Now here is where we *stop the clock* for a moment and prepare our minds for not a "Yes, but..." but a "Yes, AND..." from Jesus. This maneuver where Jesus uses their own hypocritical words and their own challenge of Him to bring them down is what I like to call '**Spiritual Judo**'. The Pharisees don't know it but Jesus is about to throw them for a loop!]

Let's read verse 17 again *Mark 2:17*: *"On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

"Yes," Jesus agrees, "they are sick and sickening sinners, everyone of them – but that is why I am here! It is *NOT* the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Your assessment, your diagnosis of these people is correct; you could not be more right, but I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." The passage does not go on to describe the looks of the Pharisees as their faces fall to the ground! Their mouths are hanging open – "What? ...What?" They look around at each other – "What did He say?" It's like Jesus hit them over the head with a sledge hammer. "It was such a good question... What happened? I thought we had Him..."

On some level they sense He has just made sense, but it is so contrary to their contorted and tortured revision of the historic Jewish faith that they cannot even process it--"What does He mean 'sick... doctor... healthy... righteous'? We're going to have to, uh, get back to you on this, Sir."

What All Did Jesus' Succinct Answer Mean?

And as I previewed this week's sermon last week, I repeat now no less than eight implications or attestations or accusations that Jesus is making in His 22-word answer to the challenge of the Pharisees:

1. "Yes, these pathetic, sick sinners need a doctor."
2. "I Am the Doctor."
3. "You obviously are not the doctors because doctors have contact with their patients. Doctors routinely risk having contact with their contagious, sick patients."
4. "I would be seeking out more contact with you Pharisees but *you aren't sick, you are healthy and righteous.*"
5. "Actually, you are sick, and you are NOT healthy and righteous, but your self-diagnosis is that *you* have decided *you are* healthy and righteous."
6. "These people are sick with sin, only they, unlike you, *know* they are sinners."
7. "You Pharisees, on the other hand, are self-deceived and you seek not a physician."
8. "You are not only *wrongly self-diagnosed* and *self-deceived*, you also don't really care about these needy people, and since you are NOT doctors, why don't you get out of the hospital and get out of the way and go home?"

You see the publicans and sinners have one virtue the Pharisees do not have; they are honest! They KNOW they are the dregs of society because they KNOW that the only people who will hang out with them are other low-lifers like themselves. And now they also KNOW that the One that John the Baptist called "*The Lamb of God,*" the One Who received the utterance from Heaven when John baptized Him along with a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit, the One Who can heal leprosy and teach like no other has shown up in Capernaum—and mercy of all mercies, **HE LIKES US!**

Jesus Loves Sinners!

And sinners who acknowledge their sin love Jesus! The sinners and tax-collectors may be a moral mess and a Spiritual disaster but at least they still live in reality! The Pharisees *actually believe* they are not sinners. That is

not living in reality! How about us? Do you and I live in reality? Don't answer that question too quickly. Don't limit your conception of not living in reality to a psychotic patient who lives in a world of his own.

Some people break the law, denying the rules of society, and they are unrealistic about the likelihood of being caught. Some people, Christians included, live in two worlds – a secret world in which they the sin privately and their main world in which they are respectable and responsible. They somehow feel or believe these two worlds will never come together, but the Bible says, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."*

I PERSONALLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU JUDGE YOURSELF SO YOU WON'T BE JUDGED.

Reality and Responsibility

Many people drink alcohol to distort reality and to feel either better or numbed, if only temporarily. **We all need to "accept reality" and to become interactive with and responsible in the real world.** The Pharisees not only deny the reality of their own real sins in the real world, they also deny their own needs within the framework of reality.

If I asked you "Are the Pharisees sinners?" you would say, "Yes, of course, all men are sinners." But what would you say if I asked, "How terrible were they as sinners?" Let's look at the climax of this section and ask, "What kind of sinners are they?" *Mark 3:6:*

Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

This is murder. Which is worse, cheating a person out of money, as the tax collectors did, or murdering someone? And why do they decide to murder Jesus? What did He do that deserves such a reward?

In our Levi passage, Jesus tells His disciples they don't have to fast during Jewish fasting times until He is no longer physically with them on the Earth. In the passage after that He allows them to glean the corner of a field for food on the Sabbath. The Pharisees didn't mind the gleaning; it was part of God's commandments for farmers to leave some produce growing in the ground when they harvested to provide for those who were needy.

But to the Pharisees gleaning was working, so to them, Jesus' disciples were working on the Sabbath. And then, finally, in the beginning of chapter 3, Jesus healed a man's shriveled hand on the Sabbath, in the Synagogue, right in front of everyone.

"Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus" (Mark 3:6). Are these acts of Jesus grounds for murder? Would *you* contemplate murder for someone Who ate with sinners, Who chose not to fast, Who gleaned some food to eat on the wrong day and Who healed a shriveled hand?

The Pharisees would and ultimately did! Rome ended up carrying out the crucifixion, but Rome didn't really have any desire to kill Jesus as long as He didn't cause the people to take up arms.

THE PHARISEES ARE THE MEANEST, MOST HATEFUL, MOST SINFUL AND SICKEST PEOPLE IN ISRAELI SOCIETY!

Do you know why the Pharisees do not want to minister to and help and heal the second tier of sinners beneath them? Because they need someone to look down on. The rabble are necessary for their pride enhancement. They need the “bottom-feeders”! The common, lower class sinners are a NARCISSISTIC NECESSITY for the Pharisees.

They don't want them to get or be well or do well. So what do the Pharisees do in their spare time? They spend their time keeping all their rules so they can feel superior. Earning their salvation is their full-time job. They are in it for themselves. They hate Jesus, and they hate the people! Men like Nicodemus are the exceptions that prove the rule.

The Pharisees are hard-hearted, hateful, hurtful sinners themselves, who block the way to the Throne of God every way they can think of—with Satan's help.

“This Jesus has to be stopped!”

He is starting to turn their world upside down, which is really right-side-up! But they should confess one thing about Jesus – He really *unites* people. Who on all the Earth could unite the nationalistic, separatist “Rome-resenting” Pharisees with the accomodationist Herodians, pragmatic Jews who believe the way to go is to cooperate with Rome and support Herod, their political under-lord?

The Leaders of the People Fear Jesus

The Pharisees feel threatened by Jesus' influence and believe Jesus is obviously **not** the Kingly Champion of the Old Testament prophecies who will pull Rome down and begin the Messianic One Thousand-year Kingdom on Earth.

The Herodians also feel threatened by Jesus' sway over the people and believe He could bring down the wrath of Rome on Israel, “No one should have this much influence over this many Jewish people. He is a political 'powder keg!' ”

Jesus is the great uniter.

He unites those who are for Him—and He unites those who are against Him. It's hard to be neutral about Jesus, and it must be by design because He said Himself, *“He that does not gather with me scatters abroad.”* Jesus says to the end time apostate Church in *Revelation 3:15*, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot – I am about to spit you out of My mouth.”*

JESUS LIKES PEOPLE THE SAME WAY I LIKE MY COFFEE. I like very hot coffee, kept hot by hot milk. To my surprise, I tried some iced coffee and liked it! But lukewarm, room-temperature coffee – YUK! Of course Jesus likes people who are HOT for God, but He also prefers people who are cold toward Him – more, than those who are lukewarm. At least those who are cold toward God and God's Son, and who are hostile and angry

with Him, take Him seriously! The greatest form of rejection is NOT love nor hate, but indifference. I allow that some atheists are indifferent and unemotional about God.)

The lukewarm are those people who say, by their lifestyles and attitudes, "I believe to some extent in God, and I think Jesus is probably God, but They are not important. Yes, I might believe God created everything but it's just not a big issue for me. Please don't make me uncomfortable about death and judgment; I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

Do you know what a person like that is to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is God incarnate? Saliva, spit—or vomit; something He wants to spew out of His mouth!

Why did Rabbi Saul of Tarsus become Paul the Apostle? Because he was not indifferent. Sometimes people struggle like a fish because they are hooked, but deliver me from the man or woman with whom talking about God is like pushing on mush!

Have you heard that atheism is having a new day? Books are coming out. Atheists are seeking public debates. During this Christmas Season they are putting anti-God advertisements on the sides of public buses. They feel that they, especially if you include the agnostics, are becoming numerous. They believe science has made religion obsolete and religion is dangerous besides. They are *thinking* mostly about militant Muslims, but mainly they *attack* Judaism and Christianity. The militant Muslims, who are causing havoc in at least 20 countries, also are primarily against Jews and Christians, not atheists.

How ironic. The book of Revelation predicts an alliance between a political "beast" and a religious false prophet. **Frankly, the atheist movement excites me!** They will probably cause a Spiritual Revival! God can use this. God can use them! There is nothing that will drive a man or women back to Theism than a better understanding of atheism.

When you begin to hear their rants and their insistence that our existence is an "against all the odds accident," and that our existence is therefore a meaningless, purposeless accident of meaningless, purposeless nature, in a meaningless, purposeless universe in which our meaninglessness gives us our only real meaning; when you begin to get the gist of it and the nullifying of the sin concept and the despair that it breeds, you'll want to break down the church doors to get back in!

OPTIONAL: "Our Woody Allen Despair Broadside" [which may or may not be attached]

But I do agree with the atheists and agnostics about self-righteous religious people who have shriveled up, dried up, puny hearts and who beat people over the head to impose their will on others. (Thankfully, Christians rarely *cut off* people's heads.)

Coercion Is Contrary to the Gospel Message

General Eisenhower had a great little illustration he used to show officers on "how to influence and lead troops." He would place a string on his desk and say, "Okay, move the string by pushing on one end of it." Do this mentally. What happened to the string in your imagination? Then Ike would say, "Okay, now, pull the string from the other end." That is the right way to lead people to the Throne of God – draw them, woo them,

attract them, pull them; don't push on them.

Let's leave it to the militant Muslims to say, "Death to the infidels!" **That is not Jesus' way.** The only people He was ever scathing towards were the rigid Pharisees and Scribes, which was merciful, because they could not hear Him! Such people you must make mad before you can make them glad! Disdain for self-righteous hypocrites is something atheists and Jesus have in common.

I would even agree with the atheists about myself, because in spite of all the grace I have received in this town and in this life, there is still a Pharisee in me! I like to tell about how God humbled me and how I am a trophy of His grace – and that I can look down on no one. Still, I've heard that pride is like weeds; it will grow almost anywhere! Without the grace of God in my life I am still capable of resentment—okay, political anger, character assassination; okay, hatred, anger, being rejecting and (perish the thought) homicide. Well, I don't see myself ever committing homicide, but perhaps an occasional maiming.

Do you know what group in our modern times is the most comparable to the Pharisees? Here are some clues:

1. The Pharisees were the Orthodox believers of their day. They believed the Bible from cover to cover.
2. They attended Services regularly.
3. They loved the old Psalms and Hymns the most.
4. They tithed.
5. They loved to be greeted with honor and respect in the market place, especially during the Holy Days.
6. They loved to have their biases constantly reinforced, and they strictly separated themselves from the views and opinions of any doubters.

Are you beginning to get the answer? Yes, the people who respond the most to the core values of the Pharisees are the Evangelical Christians!

"Lord, please convert the heart of the Pharisee in me."

The Lord's Supper:

Matthew 2:1-6

#1 Take the Bread

Matthew 2:13-15 and 2:19-23

#2 Take the Juice

Note: If you are on your own and are having difficulty getting to a good church (as some are who receive these sermons), have your own church service with a friend, and have your own communion service. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* Matthew 18:20 (King James Version)