

FOR SINNERS ONLY

When Jesus was carrying out His earthly ministry, He made it a point to go where He was needed and where the people realized they had a need. Jesus was often in the company of publicans (tax collectors) and other outcasts of society. Apparently, He did not choose to be around the Pharisees.

If Jesus were in our hometown on Sunday morning, where would we expect to find Him? Hopefully, it would be in our church. Hopefully, we realize our needs. If our answer is anywhere except in our church, then we are thinking as the Pharisees thought.

One of the outcasts with whom Jesus associated was Levi (or Matthew) a tax collector. Some Bible teachers would have us believe that Jesus had such a magnetic personality that all He needed to do was to walk by and say "Follow Me" and people would jump up and go with Him. When Jesus called people to follow Him, it was in the power of the Holy Spirit. When Peter, James and John left their fishing boats full of fish it was because Jesus had gotten to know them and had demonstrated His power by telling them where to put the net to catch all those fish.

When Jesus called Levi, what had just happened? Do you remember the story of when Jesus was in a house and people were coming to be healed and a paralytic was carried to the roof and let down through the roof? There was a nearby tax-collection point and the man sitting in the tax office was Levi.

Luke 5: 27-32 Tax Collectors were Jews who worked for the Romans. They were despised by their fellow countrymen. In Jesus Matthew found acceptance and in his joy, he immediately left everything. There was need to tell his friends (other tax collectors). This joy is contrasted by the envy and indignation of the Pharisees. They were caught up in their religious activities that they had totally missed the point of what God wanted to do through the descendants of Abraham and the nation of Israel. We need to be careful that we too do not get caught up in man-made traditions or be playing church and then miss out on the Kingdom of God and what He is doing. If we major on the minors, then we will always be a minor league.

Jesus tried to put the question of our spiritual lostness in terms of physical sickness so we can understand the dynamics of what happens in the process of coming to God through Jesus Christ for salvation. A person may be mortally ill, but unless he realizes his illness, he will not seek help from physicians. In the same way, each person is infected with a spiritually fatal disease (born of the seed of Adam) and unless we recognize our lost spiritual conditions, then we will not come to God for salvation.

A parable Jesus told illustrates the difference in those who want to be righteous and those who are just self righteous.

LUKE 18:9-14 It is not difficult to determine to whom this parable was aimed? We can see an immediate conceptual problem the Pharisee had regarding God's requirement for salvation. We can know we are saved but it is not by all the religious things we do. Do we look down on others?

The Pharisee told God "how great I am." There is a great tendency for us to compare ourselves with others and then confess everyone else's sins. We still do this. We find ourselves in league with the devil by being an accuser of our brother in Christ.

We must approach God with honesty and nothing with which to pay for His grace and favor.

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