

Main Idea: The fact that Jesus is a friend of sinners is controversial. Indeed, when on earth He cared enough to be controversial. In Mark 2:13-22, we see the Friend of sinners producing controversy in two ways.

- I. Jesus’ controversial associations (13-17)
  - A. He reached out to unlikely people (13-14).
    1. Discipleship is personal.
    2. Discipleship involves change.
  - B. He spent time in unexpected places (15-16).
    1. He went after down-and-outers.
    2. He went after up-and-outers.
  - C. He operated by an uncomplicated perspective (17).
    1. You can’t help people who don’t think they need it.
    2. You can help sinners.
- II. Jesus’ controversial actions (18-22)
  - A. His disciples didn’t fast (18).
  - B. He explained why (19-22).
    1. You don’t fast when it’s time to celebrate (19-20).
    2. You don’t sew new cloth into an old garment (21).
    3. You don’t pour new wine into old skins (22).
    4. You don’t make the Messiah fit into a man-made system.

Make It Personal: Three important questions...

1. What do sinners think of you?
2. What do *you* think of you?
3. What does Jesus think of you?

The friend of sinners. What effect does that phrase have on you? Encouraging? Hope-giving? How about controversial? That’s what it meant for Jesus, as we’ll see this morning. And for us, if we follow in His steps. It’s our privilege to look carefully at another life-changing account from the life of Jesus found in Mark’s gospel, in our series, “*The Servant in Action*.”

*Scripture Reading: Mark 2:13-22*

Jesus is a friend of sinners. Is that a good thing? “Sure it is,” you say. “I wouldn’t be in church today were it not true.”

That’s right, of course. None of us would be here apart from His amazing love for sinners. But the fact that Jesus is a friend of sinners refers not only to you and people like you, but to all kinds of sinners including people whose sin may be offensive to us.

Not long after we moved into our current facility in 1990, we faced a dilemma. We now had a beautiful, new place to worship the Lord. We also were attracting new people, *sinners* to be precise. Two of these sinners happened to be young boys who were quite mischievous, both from rough home situations, both non-churched, both with a “destructive bent,” if you know what I mean.

One of our children’s workers came to me, visibly upset, and said, “You know about... (and he named the two boys). Well, so-and-so told me he’s upset about how the boys are disturbing things around here in our new church, and that I need to tell them not to come back. What should I do? They need to be here, don’t they?”

It was a deciding moment for our church’s ministry. What’s really important to us, a spotless facility, or reaching sin-stained young people? What do we really think about the fact that Jesus is a friend of sinners, and calls us to be the same?

It’s at this very point that Jesus was controversial. There’s no escaping the fact that how He treated sinners produced controversy.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

Granted controversy is often a bad thing, for frequently it's generated by self-interest. But at times it's the caring thing to do to risk controversy motivated by the glory of God and the good of others.

Many people have a narrow view of Jesus. Mark shows us who He is *really*, as we have been seeing in our current series, "*The Servant in Action*," an expository study of the gospel of Mark.

The real Jesus cared enough to be controversial, especially in the way He related to "sinners." Indeed, from Mark 2:1 through 3:6 Mark records five controversies that took place in Jesus' life while He was in the Capernaum area:

- 2:1-12 Jesus told a paralytic his sins were forgiven.
- 2:13-17 Jesus ate with sinners at Levi's house.
- 2:18-22 Jesus didn't teach His disciples to fast.
- 2:23-27 Jesus let His disciples pick grain on the Sabbath.
- 3:1-6 Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

Each of the controversies pitted Jesus against the religious leaders of the day. We're going to focus on the second and third incidents this morning.

I've entitled this message, "*The Controversy Continues for the Friend of Sinners*," for the controversy indeed *continues*. It continues in Jesus' life in Mark's gospel, as we'll see. But it also continues for those who would determine to be like their Savior. In Mark 2:13-22, we see the Friend of sinners producing controversy in two ways.

#### I. Jesus' controversial associations (13-17)

By "associations" I'm referring to the kind of people with whom Jesus spent time. And who was that? In the account before us we discover three realities concerning the Master's associations.

**A. He reached out to unlikely people (13-14).** Verse 13 begins, "He went out again beside the sea." The sea, of course, refers to the Sea of Galilee. Mark revealed the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry in chapter 1 and showed His emphasis on ministry in the Galilee region. He set up headquarters in Capernaum. It was in Capernaum that, as we saw last time, Jesus healed the paralytic. Now, He heads back to the sea.

Verse 13 tells what happened next, "And all the crowd was coming to him." That's not surprising. Jesus attracted crowds wherever He went, including individuals who were hurting and searching, others who were curious, and still others who were just looking for a good show from the "Miracle Worker."

It's worth noting that Jesus went *to the people*. Here He went to the lake, to a place where He could meet people. Indeed, the Good Shepherd had come to seek the lost.

What did He do when the multitude gathered? What He did wherever He went. Verse 13 says, "And he was teaching them." It's what people needed most from Him, not miracles but teaching. Not entertainment but edification. They, like us, needed truth.

And so He taught them, not in the synagogue this time, but by the lake. He taught them right out where they lived and worked.

But there was one particular man on the heart of the omniscient Savior that day. Indeed, no matter how large a crowd may be, the Savior sees individuals, not just masses.

Verse 14, "And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him."

One of the things you can't help but see when reading the life of Jesus is that He deliberately spent time associating with people considered outcasts by the religious. Though Himself sinless, Jesus truly was (and is) a friend of sinners.

Case in point, Levi. Levi was actually his given name. We know him better as Matthew ("gift of God"), his apostolic name. Matthew is the man the Spirit of God later

used to write the first book of the New Testament. But that was much later, indeed, that would have been the last thing you would have expected Matthew to write if you had come to his tax booth prior to this day.

You see, this man was an agent of Herod Antipas, the half-Edomite. Levi was a tax collector and as such was considered a traitor by Jews.

Mark says he was sitting at his collection booth. There was a major trade route that ran from Damascus to the Mediterranean coast that ran through Capernaum. Travelers had to “pay up” at Capernaum, and Levi was there to do the collecting.

He was a hated man. It’s well-documented that the tax collectors of the day took advantage of the people by overcharging them and keeping the excess.

How ironic! Levi had a good name, named for the son of Jacob in charge of the priesthood. But this Levi was a sellout, a man who used his own people for personal gain.

The text doesn’t say but I assume Levi has been listening to Jesus, either in person or perhaps by second-hand report. Hardly a man or woman in Galilee had not heard of Jesus by this time.

And the message he heard began to affect him. Deeply. As Levi pondered Jesus’ words, he began to see himself differently. He was no longer a powerful rich man, but a poverty-stricken wretch wearing rags of self-righteousness. He began to loathe his own sinfulness. He started longing to be set free from the greedy passions of his depraved heart.

And then Jesus came to him. To HIM! He came right to his place of employment, right to his tax desk, and spoke two words that would change his life forever.

*Follow me.* That’s just like Jesus, isn’t it? The Savior wants the person no one else wants. He offers a relationship to the one that everyone else considers beyond hope.

Follow me. That simple command teaches us two critical lessons about discipleship.

1. *Discipleship is personal.* Follow me, Jesus said. What an invitation! Jesus didn’t tell Levi to go get his life cleaned up and then maybe, just maybe, there might be room for him on the waiting list. No, the invitation was immediate. Follow me.

Yet it’s more than an invitation. It’s a command. Follow me. To be a disciple you must come to know the person of Jesus Christ. You must acknowledge the painful truth about yourself and your sin, then acknowledge the wonderful truth about Jesus the Savior, and follow Him. It’s personal.

2. *Discipleship involves change.* To follow Jesus meant that Levi had to do something. What was it? He had to get up out of his seat, walk away from his tax booth, and from that point forward, go wherever Jesus took him. Just think what Levi was leaving, his money, position, power, and more. It costs to be Jesus’ disciple. Luke says that Levi “left everything behind” (Luke 5:28).

It’s possible this cost was greater for Levi than any of the other disciples. Think about it. If it didn’t pan out for Peter, for instance, he could always go back to fishing. So could Andrew, James, and John. But there was no turning back for Levi. When he left his table that day, he burned his bridges.

The song-writer later put it this way, “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. *I surrender all.*”

Levi did just that. And he did it because it was worth it. As Samuel Rutherford would say, “O my sweet Lord Jesus, a smile from Thee is better than kingdoms.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In J. D. Jones, p. 52.

Levi lost his toll booth, yes, but he gained the kingdom of God. He said goodbye to big paychecks and comfortable living, but for the first time in his life he began to lay up eternal treasures in heaven.

Commentators have suggested that the only thing Levi took with him was his pen. Whether that's true or not is speculation. But we do know that that this man would later be the Spirit's instrument to introduce millions, even billions of people to the Savior, by writing the gospel that bears his name, *Matthew*.

So yes, when it came to associations, Jesus reached out to *unlikely people*.

**B. He spent time in unexpected places (15-16).** Here's an example, in verse 15, "And as he reclined at table in his house." Whoa! Where did Jesus go? To Levi's house, to the house of a tax collector. That in itself raised a few eyebrows. And what happened there added fuel to the fire.

Verse 15 again, "And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him." It's one thing to see Jesus interacting with *one* tax collector. Now He's rubbing shoulders with a whole bunch of them.

What are they doing at Levi's house? Luke's account adds this detail in Luke 5:29, "And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them." So Levi, or Matthew, gave a big reception for Jesus at his house and invited his former work associates and others.

There wasn't a person of solid reputation on the list, just tax collectors and sinners. And don't miss the word *many*. The place was packed with what we might call the "low life" of society.

Why did they come? It's one thing to get an invitation, but why would this kind of crowd come to be with a Jewish rabbi? The final words of verse 15 give us a clue. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Levi's business associates and others came to this meal, but Mark alone mentions that these folks were also, like Levi, *following Him*.

What does that indicate? It indicates that they, too, had become fed up with their sinful life. They, too, had recognized their need to change, to become different. And they, too, by the grace of God, began to believe that Jesus was the answer. And so, they began *following Him*.

You say, "I don't get it. What would prompt men and women to leave good paying jobs, with all the security and comfort money provides, and start following this itinerant preacher named Jesus?"

The answer is, what prompted them was what prompted Levi. Truth. They heard the truth that Jesus that proclaimed, and they started thinking about it. And what was the truth? Mark told us back in 1:15, where Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

It's that message, that *truth*, that the Spirit of God used to rescue them. They hadn't been living for God's kingdom, but foolishly for their own. And they were slaves to that pursuit, powerless to change.

But Jesus said they could change, if they would repent, and believe the good news. And by the grace of God, they did. At His invitation, they started following Him.

It's amazing to think about the kind of people that Jesus included on His team. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were men who worked with their hands, fishermen. Levi was a crafty tax collector, a man who sided with the Romans. Simon the Zealot was probably part of a group that sought to eliminate men like Levi, for they hated the Romans and especially hated Jews who sold their souls to the Romans.

That's what you found in the early church. You sat in worship services right next to people who previously had been your enemies, who used to rip you off, who belonged to

different political parties. Those were huge differences, but they no longer divided you. Why not? Because you had something in common that far surpassed the differences. You all had *Jesus*, and that was enough.

Do we believe that? Yes, we do. Just look around this room too. Do we have differences? Indeed, we do. There's no reason we should be here together, except for the one that is all the reason we need. We all know, love, and cherish the same Savior, who has reconciled us to God, and to each other.

Sadly, not everybody believes that. Certainly, in this text, not everyone believed it.

Look at verse 16, "And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

So, Jesus' associations produced a stir. Most of the religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees, didn't like what they saw.

Who were the Pharisees? Josephus, a first century historian, wrote this about them, "The Pharisees [are] a body of Jews with the reputation of excelling the rest of their nation in the observance of religion, and as exact exponents of the laws."<sup>3</sup>

The Pharisees took religion seriously. Is that a bad thing? Last week Kevin DeYoung wrote an article that got my attention, entitled, "Two Cheers for Religion":

Religion is one of those words that has undergone a decisive transformation in recent years. Religion used to be a generic category or even a positive synonym for the Christian faith, but now many Christians speak of religion as something harmful and destructive of true Christianity. For many evangelicals, religion is about trying to earn God's favor. Or, more broadly, religion is about a stultifying system of rituals, dogmas, and structures.

In short, religion is bad, the gospel is good, and following Christ is positively not a religion.

Obviously, if the choice is between the gospel and religion, I'll take the gospel. But what if by relentlessly denigrating "religion," we are creating as many problems as we are trying to solve?

If I can be so bold, I'd like to put in a good word for religion... People tend to equate commands, doctrines, structures, and rituals with religion. That's why people want to be "spiritual but not religious." And yet, Christianity *is* a religion that believes in commands, doctrines, structures, and rituals. As a Jew, so did Jesus. Jesus did not hate religion.<sup>4</sup>

The Pharisees were not wrong because they were religious, any more than a rich person is wrong because he's rich, or a mother is wrong because she adores her children. The problem was that their religion, just like the rich man's money, and the mother's children, became the object of their trust and affection. They were idolaters, worshippers of rival gods. And this idolatry became apparent when the true God entered their presence in the person of His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

It's interesting that in verse 16 the Pharisees took their criticism, not to Jesus, but *to His disciples*. "Hey, Peter, what's your Rabbi doing at Levi's house? Doesn't he know that that guy's a scoundrel?"

It wouldn't be the last time Jesus went to unexpected places, either. In fact, coming to earth was an unexpected place. "You're going where?" the angels must have thought.

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<sup>3</sup> In Wessel, p. 635.

<sup>4</sup> <https://kevindeyoung.org/two-cheers-for-religion/>

And why did He come? Mark reveals the answer in his theme verse, Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

And the *many* He came to ransom included two very different kinds of sinners...

1. *He went after down-and-outers.* Prostitutes, tax collectors, “sinners.” Also...
2. *He went after up-and-outers.* The religious sinners, including the ones criticizing Him in this account. It was to the up-and-outers that Jesus turned His attention next.

Verse 17 says, “And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’” Here’s the third reality concerning Jesus’ associations. Unlikely people. Unexpected places. And...

**C. He operated by an uncomplicated perspective (17).** Which is this. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

As a pastor I’ve visited a lot of hospitals over the years, and I’ve seen a lot of people there. I’d like to share an observation. It’s profound. As a general rule healthy people don’t go to hospitals.

Jesus knew two things we tend to forget. It’s very uncomplicated...

1. *You can’t help people who don’t think they need it.* “It’s not the healthy who need a doctor...I have not come to call the righteous.”<sup>5</sup>
2. *You can help sinners.* “The sick need a doctor...I have come to call *sinners*.”<sup>5</sup>

To put it another way, Jesus came to rescue sinners, not commend the self-righteous. He called people to salvation, not self-reformation. To benefit from Jesus, one must admit one’s *need*.

A. M. Hunter observes, “It would be true to say that this word of Jesus strikes the keynote of the Gospel. The new thing in Christianity is not the doctrine that God saves sinners. No Jew would have denied that. It is the assertion ‘that God loves and saves them *as sinners*.’ This is the authentic and glorious doctrine of true Christianity in any age.”<sup>6</sup>

Please keep in mind that Jesus never excused sin. No Pharisee used any stronger language to condemn sin than did Jesus.

But when a person became a follower of Jesus, that person ceased to be what he had been, a person who lived his own way in violation of God’s law. Luke’s parallel adds the words (in Luke 5:32), “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners *to repentance*.”

Jesus meets sinners right where they are, praise God! But He doesn’t leave them there. “Just As I Am” is a wonderful song, for Jesus invites us to come just as we are. But as we come, we must admit we are sick, needing to change, and desiring it too.

Love the sinner, hate the sin. The Pharisees missed that balance. Jesus modeled it perfectly. That’s why we are here today.

My friend, Jesus operated by an uncomplicated perspective and so must we. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” What a physician Jesus is! He sees our needs. He makes a perfect diagnosis and then provides the cure. He even pays the bill!<sup>7</sup>

Jesus is a friend to sinners. That’s great news, and it’s also controversial. The friction continues as Mark records the next episode. First, Jesus’ controversial associations. Next...

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew, who was there, says that Jesus also said this, in Matthew 9:13, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

<sup>6</sup> In Wessel, p. 635.

<sup>7</sup> Observation by W. Wiersbe, p. 116

## II. Jesus' controversial actions (18-22)

In the previous controversy the critics asked Jesus' disciples a question about Jesus. In the present controversy they asked Jesus a question about His disciples. One particular action stirred the pot. It pertained to *fasting*.

**A. His disciples didn't fast (18).** "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came [Matthew's account indicates that it was the disciples of John that came to Jesus with this question, in Matt 9:14] and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

Here's the problem. John's disciples fasted. The Pharisees fasted. Jesus' disciples didn't fast, at least that's what the critics said to Jesus. Why not? That's what they wanted to know. And the unspoken question was, "Why don't You do a better job of educating your disciples, Jesus?"

We need to make something clear at the outset. Fasting, denying oneself food for a spiritual purpose, is a good thing. In the Old Testament the Lord instructed His people to fast, such as on the Day of Atonement, and on other occasions as well (see Zech 5:5-7; Jonah 3:7; Isaiah 58:3ff).

But unfortunately, what God commanded for one day and allowed on other days, the people eventually expanded into a religious ritual. By Jesus' day zealous Jews turned fasting into a mandatory twice a week tradition, fasting every Monday and Thursday.

It's significant that Jesus paid little attention to their fast days, nor the rest of the human traditions they imposed on God's commands. Indeed, at times He ignored such commands intentionally to the consternation of the Pharisees.

So, His disciples didn't fast, these "fasters" pointed out, and waited for a reply.

**B. He explained why (19-22).** Jesus used three illustrations to defend His disciples' actions (and His leadership).

*1. You don't fast when it's time to celebrate (19-20).* Verses 19-20, "And Jesus said to them, 'Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.<sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.'"

Barclay gives some helpful background: "After a Jewish wedding the couple did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week or so open house was kept and there was continual feasting and rejoicing. In a hard wrought life, the wedding week was the happiest week in a man's life. To that week of happiness were invited the closest friends of the bride and bridegroom; they were called by the name *children of the bridechamber*. . . There was actually a rabbinic ruling which said, 'All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy.'<sup>8</sup>

Jesus likens His disciples to the children of the bridechamber. How could they fast? Fasting is a sign of mourning. You don't mourn at weddings. It's not appropriate, not while He, the Bridegroom, is here.

J. D. Jones calls it "the principle of appropriateness," explaining, "It was ridiculous, He said, to expect the sons of the bride-chamber to fast in a wedding week. The outward must always be the expression of the inward, and there is absolutely no merit in the outward form unless the inward feeling is congruous with it."<sup>9</sup>

We know this. Our act of worship means nothing to God unless it comes from a *heart* of worship. Consider the parent who quizzes the child, "Did you *say* your

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<sup>8</sup> Barclay, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 55.

prayers?” Are prayers to be merely words we *say*? No. Indeed, words said to God are pointless (and can be condemning) unless they proceed from a praying soul.

God hates outward form that isn’t matched by inward feeling. Even a casual reading of the gospels reveals a stark contrast between Jesus and the stiff Pharisees and somewhat ascetic followers of John the Baptist. Jesus went to parties, played with children, and ate meals in the homes of ordinary people.

You don’t fast when it’s time to celebrate. When the Son of God comes into your life, it truly is time to celebrate.

By the way, notice the hint Jesus gives in verse 20 of His coming death, resurrection, and return to heaven. The Bridegroom is going to leave. Then there will be fasting, for in that time of absence there will be seasons of sorrow and struggle. That’s not to say joy is gone, for it’s not. He didn’t leave us as orphans but sent the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is *joy*. Joy is the norm, but we still miss the Bridegroom, and long for His return.

Jesus gave a second illustration to defend His actions in verse 21...

2. *You don’t sew new cloth into an old garment (21)*. “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.”<sup>10</sup>

So if you take a new piece of cloth and use it to patch up an old piece of clothing, you’ll have problems. When washed the stitches will rip out and you’ll have wasted the new cloth and ruined the old clothing.

What’s Jesus’ point? He’s certainly not saying that the old ways (as given in the Old Testament) were bad, for God Himself had established them, and Jesus elsewhere said He had come, not to destroy the old, but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17).

Nor is Jesus saying that new is always better than old. Indeed, to change metaphors, before we start moving fences, we ought to find out why they were put there in the first place.

Jesus’ point is that the old forms (like going to the temple three times a year, with animal sacrifices, not eating pork, and so forth) are insufficient for the newness (later He will call it the “new covenant”) He is inaugurating. It’s not that the old forms were bad, just insufficient. A third illustration...

3. *You don’t pour new wine into old skins (22)*. “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”<sup>11</sup>

They didn’t use bottles then. Wine was kept in goatskins. New skins would be soft and pliable and allow for the expansion that would happen in the fermentation process. Old skins, however, became brittle after stretching many times. So, to place new wine in an old skin would not only break the skin, but also cause the loss of new wine when the skin burst and the contents emptied all over the floor.

So there are three things you don’t do, says Jesus. You don’t fast at a wedding. You don’t sew new cloth into an old garment. And you don’t pour new wine into old skins. After giving the three illustrations, Jesus stopped and let the implication sink in.

4. *You don’t make the Messiah fit into a man-made system*. It won’t work. You can’t confine the newness of Jesus to old forms. There must be new forms of expression, and Jesus Himself gives those new forms. What are they? Just keep reading the NT.

For now, Jesus makes it clear that He came to introduce something new, not patch up the old. Quite frankly, the religious leaders might have welcomed Jesus had He agreed to

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<sup>10</sup> Luke calls these two stories “a parable,” an illustration (Luke 5:36).

<sup>11</sup> Luke adds in Luke 5:39, “And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”



mix His “new” ideas into their “old” system. But that was impossible. Their system couldn’t contain the life-giving reality He offered. It couldn’t hold it. It would rip apart like a garment. It would burst open like wineskins.

Wiersbe offers this helpful comparison. If you take an acorn and plant it, it grows into something new, an oak tree. The tree is linked to the past for sure, but it’s actually something very new. The acorn is destroyed by being fulfilled.

Again, Jesus didn’t come to patch up an old system. He came to fulfill the Law of God by keeping it with His perfect life, then by dying to pay the required penalty for those who broke it, and then by rising from the dead. By His death on the cross He cancelled the written code, and by His resurrection He opened up a new and living way.<sup>12</sup>

To put it simply, mere religion can’t save anyone. Only Jesus can do that.

Make It Personal: Three important questions...

1. *What do sinners think of you?* In today’s text, sinners came to Levi’s house. Why? Because they knew they’d find Jesus there, and they wanted to be with Jesus. Do they come to you, and for that reason? Do the sinners in your life know they’ll find Jesus in your home? And is the door of your life open to them? What do sinners think of you?

2. *What do **you** think of you?* With this question, I have in mind the religious leaders. They saw themselves as *healthy* rather than sick, as righteous rather than as sinful. How do you see yourself? A pretty good person?

You say, “How should I see myself?” I like the answer John Newton gave. “When I get to heaven,” he said, “I’m expecting three surprises. First, I’ll see people there I didn’t expect to see. Two, I’ll not see other people there that I expected to see. And three, I’ll be amazed that I am there.”

What do you think of *you*? All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, not one. Is that how you see yourself?

But the most important question is the last. It’s not what others think, or even what you think. Rather...

3. *What does Jesus think of you?* Does He know that you believe in Him, that you have received Him as your Savior and greatest treasure? Do you belong to Him, my friend? Are you heeding His invitation and *following Him*?

*Jesus! what a Friend for sinners!*

*Jesus! Lover of my soul;*

*Friends may fail me, foes assail me,*

*He, my Savior, makes me whole.*

*Refrain:*

*Hallelujah! what a Savior!*

*Hallelujah! what a Friend!*

*Saving, helping, keeping, loving,*

*He is with me to the end.*

**Closing Song:** #89 “*Our Great Savior*” (all five verses)

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<sup>12</sup> Colossians 2:13-15 explains: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”