

Hospital For Sinners
July 23, 2017

Raise your hand if you are healthy! Raise your hand if you've never been sick? Raise your hand if you've been sick longer than 4 days in a row. Raise your hand if you've been sick for a week. Raise your hand if you've been sick for two weeks. How about a month. Anybody been sick for a month at a time? Raise your hand if you have a chronic condition that is ongoing or comes and goes.

Raise your hand if you are sick with... sin? I have good news for you. Jesus came to cure us of sin.

Mark 2:14 (NIV) As he (Jesus) 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.

The Greek word that is translated as follow is a special word. It isn't special in English, but it IS special in Greek. There are ten Greek words in the Bible that are all translated as follow in English. So we do not catch the significance. The word Jesus used carried the idea, in that culture, at that time, of discipleship. This word is used of following Jesus 77 times in the Bible. Jesus intended that Levi become one of His disciples. And Levi understood Jesus' invitation that way. If Jesus did not intend for Levi to become a disciple, Jesus would have used a different word. So while it is not obvious in English, it would be obvious to first century readers.

Levi's heart is open to this invitation. He responds by quitting his tax-collecting job and becomes a disciple of Jesus. He also invites Jesus and the other disciples to his house for a meal.

Mark 2:15-16 (NIV) While 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. When 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'?"

Most societies classify some people as good and some as bad. You probably think of some people as good and some as bad. To many people, bikers are all bad people. That is a generalization and untrue, but it is a belief that some people hold. Some think that all bikers are bad people. Some think lawyers are all bad people. Some think used car salesmen are all bad people.

Well, in first century Israel, the Jews had views about who was good and who was bad. **Jewish society divided sinners into four groups.** Let's quickly review them.

> The regularly unclean.

This is not physical uncleanness. There were times this week when children and adults at Vacation Bible School were very dirty, dirty with glue or paint. If you met one in the hallway, as they were going to the bathroom to wash, you were very careful around them. They had instructions to back into the bathroom instead of putting their dirty hands on the door.

This uncleanness is not talking about dirty from glue, paint, or soil. No this is a ritual uncleanness. This unclean was invisible. **This unclean came from touching someone else or something else that was declared unclean by God.**

These were people who, because of their profession, were regularly in a state of uncleanness. They regularly touched the dead body of a clean animal. Or their uncleanness might come from touching an object that touched a dead animal. Their uncleanness might come from an unclean insect.

I was coming out of a store this week and almost ran into a small boy of about 4 and his little sister, who looked to be three. They were not keeping up well with mom because he told me they were looking for bugs. Suddenly he yells out, "And there's one," pointing to a dead dragonfly on the sidewalk. He almost touched it, which, if he were a practicing Jew, would make him unclean as the dragonfly is not clean.

Doctors, shepherds, butchers, and tanners were always coming into contact with unclean people or animals. Doing so made them unclean. This uncleanness meant they had to avoid touching other people and they could not enter the temple for worship.

> The poor, disabled, or physically ill.

Because of the negative circumstances of their lives, these people were assumed to be sinners. Of course, it was the healthy or wealthy people who made this assumption. Several times Jesus points out that this common belief was not true. But many chose to believe it.

> Criminal sinners

These were obvious sinners. These people intentionally ignored the commands of God. Sin was a way of life for them.

> Jews who helped the Roman government, by collecting Roman taxes.

You must remember as you read the new testament, that Israel was an occupied country. It had been taken over by the Romans and though there was peace, the Jews considered the Romans to be their enemies. The Romans would hire Jews to collect some taxes from Jews. This was considered to be a terrible sin by the other Jews.

Levi was a tax collector, and as such a bad person. It is this terrible person that Jesus invites to be His disciple. It is this terrible person who invites Jesus to his house for dinner.

Now who else do you think Levi invites to his party? He doesn't invite the good people in town. He knows they wouldn't come. They didn't even speak to him on the street. There was no use inviting them.

So, he invites his friends. Now who would be the friend of a Jewish tax collector? Only other tax collectors. So the guests at the party, except for Jesus and His disciples, are those that Jewish society considers to be the sinful people of Israel.

Now, the Pharisees take notice of this dinner party and that Jesus is attending it. The Pharisees were considered to be the best people in Israel. They tried harder than anyone to obey all the commands of God. They were not perfect, but it was believed that they had the least sin.

The Pharisees see Jesus at the home of Levi, and what conclusion do they draw? They conclude that Jesus is not a good person after all or He would not be there. They would not be caught dead in such a place. If Jesus is there, they think, He is not a good man.

I am sure Jesus' other disciples were puzzled by Jesus going to this party too. I am sure some of them were thinking, "How could he ask us to come in here with THESE people?"

Jesus, aware of the feelings and prejudices and questions of those present, answers the question on everyone's mind.

Mark 2:16-17 (NIV) When 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'?"

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."

The sickness Jesus is speaking of is not physical sickness. It is not mental or emotional sickness. This sickness is spiritual sickness. He is speaking about the sickness of sin.

Some people knew themselves to be sick with sin. Others, like the Pharisees, believed themselves to be healthy, that is righteous, having a right relationship with God. It wasn't true that they were healthy, but that is what they believed. As long as they believed they were spiritually healthy Jesus could not help them. He could only help those who were aware of their sinfulness.

Now let's talk about an application to us. Let me start with a question. How do you see the church today? Do you see the church as an army, doing battle with the forces of unbelief in the world? Do you see it as a newspaper, taking the good news to the world? Do you see it as a school, teaching people what the Bible says? Do you see it as a kind of business, intent on serving itself? After all, isn't the church just after people's money?

Some people see the church as a gas station, a place to get your spiritual gas tank filled when you're running low. Some people see the church as a movie theater, a place to get some religious entertainment, an hour of escape from daily cares. Some people see the church like a giant department store where there is something for everyone in the family.

I want to suggest a different picture for understanding the church. Taking our cue from what Jesus says, **I suggest that we view the church as a hospital for sinners.**

Jesus is calling to sinners, "Come, I have the cure for sin that you need. I will care for you in your illness, show you how to be healed of sin, and teach you how to guard against getting more sick with sin."

All of us who are Christians at one time answered Jesus' call to follow Him. We found hope for a cure in Jesus. We have been taking our spiritual medicine, changing our sinful habits, and are slowly finding healing from sin.

Christians must not think they are well-people instead of sin-sick. Thinking we are well-people will lead us into more sinful thinking and behavior.

- **Well-people often lack compassion for the sick.** Well-people think things like, "Well, it is their own fault they are sick with sin. They are getting what they deserve." These are attitudes the Pharisees often demonstrated.

- **Well-people can develop pride and take credit for their wellness.** Like the Pharisees, well-people are often proud of their goodness and look down on those who are more sin-sick than themselves.

- **Well-people don't want to be around the sick.**

When we are healthy, we don't want to be around sick people. Have you ever gone to the theater or been standing in a line at the store and the person behind you starts coughing? You think to yourself, "Don't cough on me. I don't want to get sick." You think about moving to another seat or getting out of line.

Christians who overlook their own problems with sin avoid other sin-sick people who come into the church. When Christians start thinking of themselves as well-people, they may turn the church into a fort to keep sinners out.

It is true that the newly converted bring many sinful attitudes, beliefs, and habits with them. It will take them awhile to learn that these are sinful. Do not avoid them. Engage them in friendship and disciple them. Be patient with them. Teach them by example that God's people don't live that way, think that way, or speak that way. If they are genuine disciples, the Holy Spirit will teach them. Meanwhile, love them. Pray for them. Trust God to work in them.

- **Well-people are often surprised by sin in their church.**

No one is surprised to find sick people in a hospital. Neither should anyone be surprised to find sin-sick people in a church. As we have emphasized this week, no one is perfect except Jesus. None of us is without sin. We will not be fully cured of sin on this side of Jesus' return.

Additionally, no one in a hospital is surprised if a doctor gets sick while working with sick people. Why is it then that we are surprised when a church leader sins against us? All the leaders of our church, even me, are still sin-sick people. I am not a well-person yet. Jesus has not accomplished that level of healing in me yet. Don't be surprised when I sin. I sinned several times toward others this week in Bible School.

As a church let us embrace the concept of being a hospital for sinners. Helping people find healing in Jesus is what the church is about. Let us keep that in mind as we live together serving Jesus.

Now we come to Jesus' invitation. Jesus is inviting you today to find healing from sin in Him. It will not come all at once. But it will start as you admit your need for this healing, put your faith in Him as the only spiritual doctor who can help you, and entrust your life into His care.