

“Friend of Sinners”

Mark 2:13–17

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We will start by looking at Mark 2. This is God's holy, inerrant and life giving Word. Mark 2:13-17 which says *[13] He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. [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.*

*[15] 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. [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?” [17] 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.”*

The grass, the flowers fall and the Word of our God abides forever. Amen.

My calendar has a date with a red circle marked on it. That date is April 15th, and you will understand that circle is not there for a birthday or holiday but it's tax day. By that date, I have to have the money the government expects me to pay and I have to have it all filed and turned in. Tax day is not a fun day for anyone. If it's bad today it was a lot worse back in the time of the Lord Jesus because for subjects under the boot of the Roman Empire, virtually every day was taxed day. So the people were rather grumpy about that subject.

In ancient times you did not fill out bureaucratic forms or give your routing and account number to the government server. No, you were preyed upon by tax collectors who were hated by all the people and they often would abuse you and take your money. The Roman government had two main types of taxes. One was a poll tax and a property tax, and the Romans took care of that but the other tax which is found in the Bible was the goods tax, the customs tax. For that tax there were local tax collectors and their job was to set up a booth on the highway. There was a big highway next to Capernaum because it was a pretty big city. From that booth they would inspect your wagon and take up to 20% of your goods out of it. They would do things like tax you for the number of spokes on the wheels of your wagon. There were other tax collectors who would be by the sea. It turns out the Sea of Galilee was one of the great fisheries of the ancient world. It was an economic engine and so the boats would come in and there's the customs booth. That's where Levi, the son of Alpheus, was. It's almost certain because it's there that Jesus confronts him while Jesus, Mark says, is teaching beside the sea.

In any society, there are more or less notorious sinners but, in this time, tax collectors scraped the bottom of the barrel, partly because of the extortion. It was an unusually corrupt system. The way it worked was the Roman government would contract with a tax collector, and that tax collector had to give a set amount to the government but there was no limit to the amount of money he could collect. So, the more money he collected, the more he got to keep. So, they preyed upon the people and they were violent. They were hated for that ungodliness but even worse, they were collaborators with the pagans who were the occupying power of their people. Kent Hughes says ‘not only were tax collectors hated for their extortions, but because they were the lackeys of the Romans, much as the way the French hated Nazi collaborators during World War II.’

According to Jewish records of the time, if you were a tax collector, you couldn't testify in court. Your testimony was not valid. You were too low on the sin scale. You were certainly excommunicated from the synagogue but not only that, all of this shame fell upon your family as well. So these are the sinners of sinners in that time. That's important because it's against that background that, as Mark tells of this tax collector, Levi, the son of Alpheus, and how Jesus comes and calls this man to follow him and be one of his disciples, it drives home the primary theme He's making, which is that Jesus Christ came so that sinners would be forgiven. This was a controversial thing.

At the end of Mark 1 and the beginning of Mark 2, there's controversy because Jesus is claiming that He has the authority to forgive sins and that was bad enough for the Pharisees and the Scribes. Now He's actually saving sinners. What was bad news to those Pharisaical legalists is great news for you and me because we are those sinners who need to be saved. Mark brings a message in this passage that we celebrate in so many of our songs. Jesus, what a friend for sinners. Jesus, lover of my soul.

I want to show you three things from this passage in Mark. First, is the call of Christ as the Savior, second, the cry of new life of the new believer, and third, the controversy of the Gospel for those who are self-righteous. Let's look at the first of these – the Call of Christ. He calls Levi the tax collector. Now, fascinating that this man is going to be later known as the disciple and the apostle Matthew. The same account is in Matthew 9:9 and it shows not only Jesus forgiving grace, but also His saving power. The call of Christ is effectual and mighty. The brevity of what happens here highlights the sovereign nature of the call of Christ.

Mark 2:13-14 says *[13] He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. [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.* Now, Mark has already noted that Jesus was mainly about the preaching of the Word. Yes, He healed people because He had compassion, but He was mainly preaching the Word, which is what He's doing back at Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, and there's a great crowd of people but then He sees one of these tax collectors at his tax booth where he's taking a portion of the catches that are coming in. Think of the drama of that. There was this big crowd. Jesus is preaching. It's the beginning of His ministry and Jesus walks over to a tax collector. People are probably thinking, 'What's he going to say to a tax collector? Oh, Jesus is going to confront the scum of the scum, the low of the low, the sinner of the sinner' and Jesus says the last thing they would expect Him to say, for He says, "Follow Me."

Immediately after Jesus says that, this hardened member of the worst class of sinners rose and followed Him. Now, this does show the sovereign power of the call of Christ when He converts a soul. Theologians refer to it as the effectual calling of the Gospel. We distinguish between the general calling and the effectual calling. The general calling is what I do, you do, what God's church does – we proclaim forgiveness in Jesus' name to everyone, far and wide. But there's a problem, or at least a limitation with that and that is according to the Bible, sinners are not able to answer the general call. They are not able to come. Jesus speaks of this in so many places, but I think of John 6:44 where He says *[44] No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* No one can come to the Father for it's a matter of ability because of the slavery of sin. He's speaking about the sovereign grace of the effectual calling. He's describing, the Holy Spirit, attending to the preaching of the Word, so that the heart is changed. It's the effectual calling and it occurs whenever a sinner comes to saving faith in Jesus.

This is actually one of the classic examples of it in all of Scripture. We've already noted, Levi is such a hardened sinner that he's already traded in his natural loyalties for money but what makes it worse is where he's doing it. He's doing it in Capernaum in Mark 2 this is at the highlight of Jesus' preaching and healing ministry. Already, demons have been cast out. Mass numbers of sick have been healed. Jesus is preaching to a large crowd in this city which is probably a city of about 15,000 people, a relatively significant city and Jesus has turned that place on its head. Everyone's talking about Jesus and people are coming to Jesus.

There sits Levi, the tax collector. He doesn't care. You know, people like that today, they're not interested in things of the soul. Many commentators say, this must be the end of a long process. Levi had been convicted of his sin and was thinking about it. There are people who are not convicted of their sin and are not thinking about it. That's really what he is. There's no evidence here at all that he was reflecting about his soul. In fact, Mark says he was seated in the tax booth and if you know Psalm 1, that's the height of depravity – seated in his depravity. He's dug in to tax collecting and all it represents – a love of money, the hate towards his fellow man. He's completely immersed in that. No, Levi is not a person who's coming because he's been working on his soul.

Ephesians 4:18 describes him, and so many unbelievers like him when it says [18] *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.* So, if this Levi was going to be saved, it was because Jesus saved him and the power to save him was going to come from the Lord. That's exactly what happens. Jesus not only offers forgiveness, but He actually changes the sinner's heart, and He does it through the preached Gospel. Jesus reformed the thing that Levi needed most and the last thing on his mind. "Follow Me," He commanded and Levi rose and followed Him.

Now, what we're seeing here, we call the effectual calling. It is one of those doctrines of grace. It fits into the whole pattern of God's sovereignty and salvation. The Bible teaches very clearly that God chose certain persons from eternity past. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Jesus said, 'you did not choose Me. I chose you' (John 15:16). In John's Gospel, Jesus frequently speaks about those people You (the Father) have given to Me. So there are people chosen by God apart from any merit of their own in eternity past but there is a time when those elect persons must be saved and when they're saved, it's by the effectual calling of Christ through the Gospel. It is God who chooses them and God who saves them by believing in Jesus. Now this means that all the glory of salvation belongs to God.

It also means that you and I don't have the right to despair of any one's salvation. If you did a survey among the Godly in Capernaum, who's the least likely convert? Here he is. By the way, if you've done a survey in my apartment building in 1990, who's the least likely convert? It might have been my name that came up. I wonder if you were an unlikely convert but don't forget about those people in your life who just seem beyond the reach of the Gospel. There is no beyond the reach of a sovereign Lord and the general calling goes forth. It's noble, it's right. That's what you and I do. Let's preach Christ far and wide because it's Christ who takes our general calling and makes it effectual. The least likely people are saved, are forgiven of their sins because Jesus is able to call the sinner to Himself. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27). There we have the powerful Call of Christ.

The second thing in this passage is the cry of new life from the believer, and for Levi who later becomes the apostle, Matthew. What's going on in this passage is not primarily a theological matter. It's a very deeply personal matter. He rose and followed Him. I love the

Matthew version of this because he's writing about his own conversion and he's writing it in the Bible. If I was able to get an up close and personal look or even touch of the one of the first hand written copies of a book from the New Testament I would choose the Gospel of Matthew, and I would say, 'Can I have Matthew 9:9?' I am sure there would be smudges on that page and they would be smudges of tears from the Apostles eyes as his mind goes to a distant time, a distant place and says "Jesus called me and I rose and I followed Him."

Every Christian can give a version of that testimony and these words 'rose' and 'follows' speak to the radical change that happens in the life of everyone who is called effectually by the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe in Jesus is to follow Him. That's what the word disciple comes from. It means we're on a path following Jesus. It's a path that leads us into a deeper knowledge of God, His glory and grace. It's a path that leads us into more and more Godly living. It's also a path that leads to our public witness so that others may be forgiven as they hear about Jesus Christ.

When a baby comes out of the mother's womb, I've been there five times, only five. I have five children. I'm not there for your deliveries. I'm there for my wife's deliveries and you know what you want to hear – you want to hear that baby cry. When that little voice chirps out and cries everybody smiles – oh all is well and so it is with a newborn Christian. The cry of new life is the witness of the Gospel to the people that they know – telling others about the forgiveness he or she has received. If you go on further in this passage, Levi is so excited to have been called by the Lord Jesus.

Here's how Luke puts it in Luke 5:29; *[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.* You see, he's so grateful to be saved, to be called by Jesus. He wants to be with Jesus. I hope you have that experience where when you're born again you want to be with Jesus, you want to be at church. You want to be worshiping Him. You want to hear the Word preach. You want to be reading the Bible yourself. You want to be praying. Levi had Jesus there in the flesh. He wanted Jesus to be at his table, and he wanted his friends to learn about the forgiveness that Jesus offers through the blood of His cross. In Mark's version from Mark 2:15 it says *[15] 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.*

As Jesus goes into the tax collector's house, attends a banquet filled with tax collectors and other kinds of sinners that this endorses for some people, the idea that we should be willing to engage in the wicked revelry of the world in the cause of evangelism. My friends, there's nothing further from the truth. I loved how Harry Reeder put this because he would point to this passage and would say that Levi did not hold a party for sinners to which he invited Jesus, for he invited a party for Jesus, to which he invited sinners. And there's a world of difference between the two. We can be sure that Jesus is not engaging in ungodly revelry. No, he's present. He's meeting people. He's proclaiming forgiveness in His name as He teaches God's Word.

Now, this term's tax collectors and sinners have almost a technical meaning at the time, and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they use the term sinners not to describe everyone for everyone is a sinner but they meant those classes of persons who did not observe their own requirements, their own rules were flagrantly disobeyed by these people. Some of them would be really flagrant sinners like tax collectors and we know there were many prostitutes there, but many others were just common laborers. One writer says they were too busy, too poor, and too ignorant to live up to the rules of the religious authorities.

They're like most people today. Many people today are not even conscious of their sinning. Oh, their consciences testify, but their consciences are dulled. If you tell them they are in rebellion to God, they'll say, "I'm not thinking I'm in rebellion against God. I'm just living in this culture and it's a wicked culture and people are just going on." They're doing what the media tells me to do. They're following the models on tik-tok and social media. They're just living in a dissolute manner, but they are in rebellion to God. Here's the thing; Jesus went and associated with them. This is the point. As Levi gives the cry of new life, it's answered by Jesus. He attends the gathering of sinners that His Gospel might be proclaimed.

The Gospel of Mark says that He reclined at a table and that means He hung out with them. Jesus took an interest in these wicked people, these regular sinners. He got to know them. He would have asked them questions. He would have explained what He was doing, what He was proclaiming. Danny Aikin describes Jesus as "embracing fellowship with the seemingly unlikely, the socially undesirable and the spiritually unhealthy." Do you know people like that who are the seemingly unlikely, the socially undesirable, the spiritually unhealthy? These were not shunned by Jesus, but they were invited with a gracious offer of forgiveness from God through faith in His Son.

In fact, let me address you directly. If you're one of these people whose seemingly unlikely, socially undesirable and spiritually unhealthy, maybe you feel looked down upon by cleaned up religious people, you know, you're probably wrong and they probably don't. But if you think they do come to Jesus Christ and you can see right here in the Bible that Jesus is willing to accept you. In fact, not only is He willing to accept you, and you think you're far from God, living in folly and self-destruction and yes, wickedness, yet Jesus came into the world that sinners like you would be saved. What an invitation to you sinner that you are to come to Jesus Christ.

There are examples of churches who I suppose have acted in that way and have not wanted people who weren't cleaned up into their midst at all. But Jesus shows us that Christians are to love those who are caught up in an ungodly lifestyle. We're not to endorse the ungodly lifestyle, but we want them to come. We welcome them. We invite them to come to hear God's Word and meet Jesus so as to be saved.

Arquette Hughes tells an illustration from the stuffy times of the 19th century in England. There was a woman and she was a sinner. She had a child out of wedlock. She was in an ungodly, unmarried relationship. She actually brought her mixed race, illegitimate child to the church, to a women's Bible study. She was blessed by it because she never really heard God's word and she was really intrigued. The prayers had touched her heart. But then the rector comes to her afterwards and says, 'Would you mind not coming back again? Because the ladies had said that if you come back and bring that child, they're not going to return.' The woman said to him, "Sir, I know that I'm a sinner, but isn't there anywhere a sinner can go to hear of Jesus?"

My friends, the answer is yes. Oh, sinner, go to Jesus Christ. Oh, sinner, come to the church. Except the invitation, because you have a welcome from Jesus Christ. You can go to the Son of God. He is the friend of sinners. Yes, it shows that our church should be places where sinners feel a welcome of love, even if their circumstances stand out among God's people.

Also, Jesus' example at Levi's banquet sets an example for us but let's not fail to notice the sterling example that Levi himself gives of what we call today friendship evangelism. Friendship evangelism is so valuable. He wanted his friends to meet Jesus. He wanted them to learn that there is forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you realize that you are to be His cry of new life? The spontaneous response to the saving call of Jesus is that you invite others to the

table. Do you realize that's true of you as well? Your friends are praying for you, Briarwood Church. The Lord has, in His wisdom and goodness taken from you a very great man (Harry Reeder) who was your pastor who carried a lot of weight and there aren't many Harry Reeders falling off trees. But the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will always be there for you. We're praying that the Lord will provide you a pastor at the right time.

In the meantime, you be like Levi and invite people in your work place and families to come to church. I'm sure Briarwood is going to preach to Jesus when they come. When I preach at the church God has called me to the most encouraging words to me after the service are not 'thank you for the sermon, it was a good sermon.' That's all very nice, actually. I do appreciate that but what I love to hear is, "Pastor, I'd like you to meet so-and-so, a friend who I brought to church." I have a deal with my congregation where they bring their friends to church and I will preach Jesus to them. So, it's a time for, among other things, to engage in and lay person outreach. Start reaching out to your friends.

What does Levi do? This is what evangelism is. We can imagine him saying to his friend, 'Friend, I want you to meet Jesus. I want you to know who He is. I want you to learn of the forgiveness.' And then Jesus, 'here's my friend.' That's the role of prayer in evangelism. Are you praying for the unconverted in your lives? Another deal with my congregation is it's reasonable for your pastor to ask you to pray explicitly for the salvation of at least one person. Is that fair enough? Feel free to exceed that zeal and exceed the standard but every Christian surely should have at least one person and daily praying for your brother, your mother, your father, your sibling, your next door neighbor, your colleague, the person who afflicts you that God would give you the opportunity for you to invite them to church so they would come. When you do that you're saying, 'Jesus, I want you to meet this person. Would you take a saving interest in them?' That's what Levi does. It's the cry of new life that shows the power of Christ saving all and yet there is a great controversy that resolves that which leads to the third thing from this passage.

The third thing we see in this passage is that Jesus at this point in his ministry, is blatantly courting controversy, to be honest. I said earlier that the main theme at this point in Mark's Gospel is that Jesus came for the forgiveness of sinners, and that's been playing out the previous passage for there's a瘫痪者 who was let down through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). I hope you know the story. The crowd's too big and his friends can't get the瘫痪者 so they bore a hole in the roof and they lower them down in front of Jesus. Jesus says to the man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' The Pharisees there say, "Who does he think he is for only God can forgive sins." Jesus says, 'Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or take up your mat and walk, and so that you will know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins' He turns to the瘫痪者 and says "Take up your mat and walk." So there's already been a controversy and He's being public, and provocative, that He came to forgive sinners and now He recruits a tax collector. That's very offensive to the legalistic.

Then Jesus attends this social gathering, this evangelistic event in the house of this Pharisee. What is the thing with the Pharisees? They were the spiritual elite of their time. They were the most admired people because they lived at a very high level according to God's law. They put forth every effort to keep every commandment of the law. You're probably thinking, "What's wrong with that?" There's nothing wrong with obeying the Bible. By the way, it's not legalism to obey the Bible for the path of blessing is a path of obedience. The problem was they were erecting a false righteousness because they created their own rules. They added rules to the Bible, things that were easy to do if you were motivated enough and they declared themselves righteous and then they looked down on everyone else. In fact, the word Pharisee comes from a

Hebrew root word that means to separate. There are Christians who their primary idea of godliness is to shun other people and to separate themselves from others and that's what the Pharisees were. They were not happy that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners.

The Pharisees were determined to reject sinners, but Jesus was determined to redeem sinners. This is why, according to the Bible, the eternal Son of God was incarnate of the Virgin Mary as the Angel said to His earthly father, Joseph, 'You shall call His name Jesus, for He will deliver His people from their sins.' He came to redeem sinners. Jesus said in John 3:17, [17] *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.*

I think we can imagine these legal experts are down the street and if they had binoculars, they would be using them to look across the street and there's tax collectors and sinners and it's Levi's house and Jesus is reclining at table with them together with His disciples. Here's the question that Mark wants us to be asking – who does He think He is? The answer is He is the Son of God who has come to be the friend of sinners. He has come to seek and to save what is lost. He has come to draw sinners to Himself, that they might be forgiven through the blood of His cross.

Mark 2:17 plainly shows who Jesus thinks He is. [17] *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."* There a difference between those two. The Pharisees saw themselves as judges to condemn. Jesus saw Himself as a healer who brought a release, a remedy from sin. Now Jesus points out that a doctor who was not willing to meet with the sick would be worthless. So also, our faithful Redeemer, where Jesus sought out the company of tax collectors and sinners that by drawing them to faith in Himself, they would be forgiven of their sins.

Sinclair Ferguson has described Jesus' answer here as simple, brilliant and devastating, and the devastating part is when He said at the end of Mark 2:17, "*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*" That was devastating to the Pharisees outlook. Their whole approach was designed to maintain their own false righteousness by avoiding contact with other blatantly, unworthy sinners. It was also devastating to their appraisal of Jesus for in their eyes He had corrupted Himself. He was made impure by His contact with those that He should be despising.

Do you know where the real scandal was? The scandal was not that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. The scandal was these Pharisees who thought that by keeping their own petty rules, they were actually righteous. There's a real trap today because you and I are living in a time of extreme depravity. When you just turn on the news you see things that are pretty shocking and you're disgusted by it, in large part because it's objectively disgusting. Then we start thinking we're the righteous, they're the unrighteous. My friends, don't forget that you're a sinner. There may be acts of prudence that you take. Some Christians go to some extremes. They'll say, 'I won't enter a restaurant that has a liquor license.' That's fine. Feel free to do that. But don't think you're righteous because you do that. You might say "I won't ever go to a movie theater." Feel free. But don't think that you're righteous because of that manmade rule you keep. We must never think that because we look different than others, that we are righteous.

Romans 3:23 is one of the most important verses of the whole Bible and says [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* You are in that 'all' and notice what the standard is. You fall short of God's standard, His perfect holiness, His glory. So, if you want to be like the Pharisees and say, 'I'm going to justify myself by my works' it's not going to be by the standards that you created, it's by the perfect standard of God's holy righteousness and you will not measure up. Paul says in Romans 3:10 "No one is righteous. No, not one." That's why Jesus said,

*I came not to call the righteous.* He means those who think they're righteous by their petty good works – no, I came to call sinners.

The point is that our attitude towards Jesus is determined by whether or not we are convicted of our own sin. That's a universal principle. Our attitude towards Jesus and the value we place on Him, whether we embrace or oppose Him, whether or not we have him at the center or the mere periphery of our lives – oh how many evangelicals that have Him only at the periphery of their lives. What determines that is whether we realize that we are sinners and our greatest need at any time is a union with Christ through faith. I am only justified in Him. I am one of those sinners who needs to be forgiven. The Gospel is a key that fits only on a door inscribed with the words of another tax collector in Luke's Gospel who said, 'Lord have mercy on me, a sinner' (Luke 18:13). When you come before the Lord Jesus and say, "Lord, I am a sinner, I have no merit of my own, but You are the Son of God, and You died on the cross" that's the Gospel and the door of salvation is opened for you. He is the sinner's friend.

I want to make this point very directly. If you are not ready to confess yourself as a sinner, if it's an outrage, a controversy to you, that you must take the place of a sinner, then Jesus and His Gospel are of no benefit to you. If you desire not God's mercy, but His justice, His approval of you, then you can try yourself before that standard of judgment that says "Be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44 and I Peter 1:16). God be merciful upon me, a sinner is the only way to come to Jesus and that means that any of you can do that – any sinner can and should come to Jesus Christ just as you are. He is the friend and Savior of sinners. God sent Jesus Christ to be the answer to the problem of sin, and God delights to display His mercy in gathering sinners, to be redeemed by His blood. We have the authority of God's Word in Luke 15 that heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents so there should be joy in the church when today's tax collectors, gang members or drug dealers or abortion advocates or yes, transgender activists, when they come to the church to hear of Jesus because He is the Savior of sinners.

I want to conclude with a question and then an application. The question is this; Am I saying because Jesus gave this answer to the Pharisees that He took sin lightly? They were legalists. Does that mean that Jesus didn't think sin was a big deal? Erase that thought for it's the farthest thing from the truth. So terrible is the problem of sin that only the blood of Jesus could cleanse us from it. Gospel mindedness should cause us to go out and we certainly should never speak out on the depravity of our age for if you speak out against the debauchery going on today, that's legalism, but that's not legalism. That's Christian courage. It not legalism or Pharisaism to call sin, sin.

By the way, we're living at a time when the church had better stand up and speak the truth to a culture that is awash in lies and I'm talking about transgenderism, homosexuality and all the things going that lead to all the depravity, it is not contrary to Jesus' Gospel impulse for us to stand up and say, "That is ungodly." We have a duty to speak the truth and Jesus shows that duty as He called sin, sin, but let our duty to speak the truth about what's going on in our society not overshadow the call to mercy that we have. We must hate the sins and we must love the sinners. It's just that simple.

Jesus hated sin. There's not a shred of evidence that He was ever at all permissive toward sin. We are to be pursuing Godliness. You're not being a legalist by praising these covenant children who were just baptized to walk in the ways of the Lord. That's called life. That's called truth. That's called blessing. But what is legalism is when we despise the sinner. So, I pray that together we'll take a stand for truth in a culture awash in sin, O Briarwood stand for the truth,

hate sin, and love sinners. That's what you're known for. Rejoice when the chief of sinners come into your church. Let them feel the love of Jesus. Let them hear the Gospel.

The application is we're called to be holy. I hope you're pursuing holiness. Jesus could interact with sinners without being contaminated because He was pure and holy, so grow in Godliness but let your holiness be that of the physician, not that of the Pharisee. Let us pursue Godliness. Let us be different for we need to be different from the culture and we do it for a lot of good reasons because we're born again. We belong to God. We want God to be pleased by our life. We've been saved out of darkness into His marvelous light so we want to live in the light. There's all kinds of reasons for us to pursue holiness, but despising sinners is not one of them. Let us pursue the holiness of the great Physician and not the holiness of the Pharisees.

Let's turn our hearts from sins in order to be a blessing and a witness to those who are perishing in sin around us and as God gives us grace to lead more and more holy lives, let us never forget that we are always sinners saved by the blood Jesus. Let's never stop calling sinners to Jesus because He is the Friend of sinners and because those Gospel words are true about Him who died on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Let's pray.

**Prayer:**

Father, I thank You for this message. I thank You for Jesus' determination to show that He came for the forgiveness of sin. Father, there was controversy about it, and Jesus didn't shrink from that controversy so, Father, let us be those who are duty-bound to speak the truth and are mercy-driven, that we would love the sinner. I pray that in this church and through this church, You would draw many people to Jesus and they would learn of the forgiveness of sins and they would give the cry of new life so that the Gospel call will go on and on, and that Christ's power will cause it to save, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.