

The Outcasts:

(The Outcasts is a series of Bible studies based on those people whom most levels of society would consider unimportant, insignificant or even repulsive. These people are often overlooked or cast aside, as if they have nothing to give the body of Christ.

Rebels...backsliders...children...senior citizens...the handicapped...the uneducated...the homeless. Thankfully, God looks upon the heart and sees us for what we can become; beautiful witnesses for the Gospel of Christ. It is my prayer that through these Bibles studies you will be blessed and gain a clear vision for how the God of the Universe sees you; incredibly precious and valuable).

Jesus Calls the Outcasts

By Mary Kane

Please take a moment to quiet yourself before the Lord and ask Him to cleanse your heart from all unrighteousness. Now pray for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your heart as we open the Scriptures together. Please read Matthew 9:11-13.

Whom did Jesus see in the tax office?

What did Jesus say to Matthew?

Matthew was a tax collector—not a very reputable occupation to have in Israel. Tax collectors were not well liked due to their tendency to overcharge the people and pocket the extra money for themselves. They were despised by all law-biding citizens and ranked among the worst of sinners.

It wasn't a coincidence that Jesus walked by the tax office that day; He went there on purpose. Jesus didn't just happen to call a random

stranger to follow Him. Jesus knew all about Matthew; his flaws, his failings...and his heart.

I love it that Jesus didn't find Matthew in the Synagogue attending a seminar on how to be a better Hebrew. Matthew probably didn't have "the things of the Lord" on his mind when Jesus found him in the tax office, but he was on the Lord's mind. Jesus called to Matthew right where he was— still in the middle of his sinful life! Jesus said (my paraphrase) "Come *now* Matthew! Don't worry about cleaning yourself up, you can't anyways. I'll take care of that. Your only responsibility is to follow Me!

I can relate to Matthew's experience. That's how God found me— right in the middle of my sin. He didn't ask me to clean myself up, study hard or get my act together—I couldn't of anyways. The only requirement was that I leave what I was doing in order to follow Him. He leads and I follow. Amazing!

"Follow Me." Two short words from Jesus and your whole life change. No big long explanation. No interview. No references to check, just "Follow Me." And Matthew made the best decision of his life. He followed. Did Matthew, an Outcast, deserve to follow Jesus? No, none of us do, but He loves us and calls us anyway.

As you may have guessed, *follow* is a very significant word in this passage. The original Greek word for *follow* is *akoloutheo* which means "to follow one whom precedes, join him as his attendant, to join one as His disciple." Thayer's Lexicon remarks that "Jesus likens himself to a torch which the disciples follow." *Akoloutheo* also means "to cleave steadfastly to one, to confirm wholly to his example, in living and if need be, in dying also." Did Matthew know that he was making a lifelong commitment when he left his pitiful tax collecting job? I believe he did and following Jesus into the unknown was far better than staying behind in the known.

I wonder if Matthew knew of Jesus prior to this encounter. Had he witnessed Him preaching on the hillsides or in the synagogue or heard the fantastic reports of Him from other people in the town? Did Matthew secretly long to follow Jesus, but felt his reputation would cast a dark shadow on His ministry? Did Matthew know that in His Presence

darkness must flee! His darkness was no match for the Light of the World!

What did Matthew do after Jesus called Him?

He arose and followed Him! He didn't tell his boss he was leaving, stop to gather any personal belongings or ask the advice of a friend about his decision. Matthew did what we all need to do when the Master calls—obey immediately! Did it make sense to leave his job? No! Matthew was not promised a wage when he followed Jesus, but Jesus provided for his every need.

Please read verse 10 again.

(We are not told in this passage if Jesus went to dinner at Matthew's house immediately following the calling of Matthew or if this event transpired sometime later.)

At whose house and table was Jesus sitting (to answer that question, please turn and read Mark 2:14-15)?

Please note that *Levi* and *Matthew* are the same person.

Who else came to dinner that night?

The NKJV states that many other tax collectors and *sinner*s came to dinner that night. The original word used for *sinner*s means someone who is "preeminently sinful, especially wicked, one who is devoted to sin." This word describes in particular "men stained with certain definite vices or crimes."

Cheaters...Liars...Scammers...Robbers...Thieves...Prostitutes and the like. People who came with labels...and Jesus loved them. He still loves them.

Let's take a closer look at verse 10; there are two words tucked away in this verse that I almost missed, that are significant (if you are using the NIV, one of the words is omitted completely)! Please read Matthew 9:10 in the NKJV:

"Now it *happened*, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that *behold*, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with him and His disciples" (emphasis mine).

Let's consider each of these words separately.

Happened: In the Greek, *ginomai* which means: to become, to come into existence, appear in history, *of miracles to be performed or wrought (emphasis mine)*.

Behold: In the Greek, *idou* which means to see something, but not in the ordinary sense of seeing. This word is used to draw very particular attention to something that is about to happen. Thayer's Lexicon states that this word is used when "a thing is specified which is unexpected yet sure...when a thing is specified which seems impossible and yet occurs."ⁱ

What was *miraculous* and *unexpected* about the events of verse 10?

- It was *miraculous* and *unexpected* in the eyes of the people that Jesus wanted to eat dinner with Outcasts.
- It was *miraculous* and *unexpected* that Jesus wanted an Outcast to be His disciple.
- It was *miraculous* and *unexpected* that the Outcasts wanted eat dinner with a "religious" Person.
- It was *miraculous* and *unexpected* that a Jew would eat with a Gentile.

In Biblical days, eating a meal with someone signified that there was peace, acceptance, agreement or a congenial relationship between the two parties. Sharing a meal with the Outcasts signified that Jesus accepted and desired a relationship with them. Jesus was happy, the Outcasts were happy and the Pharisees were outraged.

What question do the Pharisees ask in verse 11?

To whom did they ask this question?

But notice, who answered the question?

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees question is brilliant, "They who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." The Pharisees wanted a Savior who only fellowshiped with the righteous. That makes as much sense as a doctor who only serves the well and the strong; a hospital that only admits the physically fit; a pharmacy that only provides medicine for the healthy. It would be strange if Jesus *did not* go to the sinners and tax collectors. I find it interesting that the Pharisees did not consider themselves to be sinners. That same attitude is the reason the Pharisees did not accept Jesus—they had no need of Him; they had worked out their own form of righteousness.

What does God's Word say about our own manufactured righteousness (Isaiah 64:6)?

We *all* have need of the Physician; Jehovah Rapha—the God Who Heals You. We all have a sickness of the soul called sin, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Salvation is a gift of God—it cannot be earned by the works of man.

What advice did Jesus then give to the Pharisees (verse 13)?

God desires that we show His mercy to the benefit of others rather than glory in our ability to make sacrifices that benefit only ourselves. The Pharisees completely misunderstood the reason that Jesus came to Earth; it was not to commend the Law Keepers but to call the unrighteous sinners to repentance. Blinded by pride, the Pharisees did not realize that they too were part of the unrighteous.

The word used for *repentance* in verse 13 is the Greek word *metanoia* which means "a change of mind, a change of the purpose of one's life, to change one's mind for the better." How thankful I am that I no longer live for my own sinful purposes! I now live according to the will and purposes of God. You too can completely change the purpose and focus of your life. Do you need a fresh start? A "do-over"? It doesn't matter how many times you have sinned or how many mistakes you have made. Jesus is waiting for you, right now, to repent and begin again. Thank you Jesus for saving an Outcast like myself and for giving me a chance to live for your purposes!

If you aren't a Christian there is no better time to become one than right now. All you need to do is tell God that you accept the death of His Son, Jesus upon the cross as a payment for your sins and ask Christ to come into your heart. When you do this, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart and you become a child of God.

All are welcome. He is calling. And remember, Jesus loves the Outcasts!

*"For I will restore health to you
And heal you of your wounds says the Lord,
Because they called you an outcast saying:
This is Zion; no one seeks her."*

By Mary Kane

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *idou* (*Strong's 2400*)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 15 Dec 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G2400&t=KJV> >