

# Home Study

## Mark's Epiphany



FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

### INTRODUCTION

Most of us are not huge fans of the Internal Revenue Service. But it's not likely that any of us have personal animosity toward IRS employees. We don't have reason to hold a grudge toward those government workers, who are just doing their jobs.

Back in Jesus' day, tax collectors were generally and universally despised, and with good reason. The land was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans typically hired locals to collect taxes for them, and allowed the tax collectors to charge extra amounts for their own personal benefit. Tax collectors were seen as cheaters and traitors to their own countrymen.

So doesn't a tax collector seem like a perfect candidate to be one of Jesus' closest, most intimate associates? No way, right?

### TODAY'S READING

Mark tells us, "Way!" He shares a remarkable story of how Jesus called a tax collector, of all people, to follow him. This man, Levi (also known in the Bible as Matthew), experienced a dramatic life-change.

Read in your Bible Mark 2:13-21. As you are reading, pay special attention to things in the story that are surprising to you, and make note of anything at all that jumps out to you about the narrative.

We read about the reaction of the religious leaders to Jesus' words and actions. But what about the other disciples of Jesus? James, John, Simon, and Andrew were fishermen in Capernaum. They most likely had been taxed – and cheated – by Levi, on a personal basis. Suddenly Jesus was inviting this scoundrel into their circle. What do you imagine was going through their minds?

According to Mark, Jesus merely said two words to Levi: "Follow me." What could have possibly compelled Levi to get up, leave behind his scandalous vocation, and begin spending time with Jesus? Was it guilt? Faith? Fear? Did he likely know some things about Jesus prior to this encounter? Did Christ's words have some miraculous power? Was the mere presence of Jesus, standing in front of Levi that day, somehow enough to inspire a new direction for Levi?

Think about what Levi was giving up, by quitting his job to follow Jesus. We may not respect his former vocation, but should we not all have respect for what Levi was willing to let go of, in order to be a disciple?

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Do you think Jesus is calling you to leave anything behind, as a disciple? What might that be?

Notice the reaction of the religious leaders. They're once again close at hand, watching and listening. They hear Jesus words, and they observe his actions. They're appalled at his willingness to associate with "sinners" and tax collectors.

This is a hard question to ask ... but, as a Christian churchgoer, have you ever quietly wondered if a particular person really "belongs" in your church? Is it possible for us, as modern-day religious people, to express attitudes like those of the religious leaders in today's story?

Jesus' selection of Levi is a drastic example of the true nature of his mission, as the Son of God coming to earth. He sums it all up in verse 17. Read these powerful words again, and consider honestly how they apply to you. Are you "the well," or "the sick"? Are you "the righteous," or one of the "sinners"?

Jesus came for Levi, and for you! Jesus called Levi, and he is calling you!

### **PRAYER**

Lord Jesus Christ, what a miracle of grace we see in the story of Levi! How kind you are! What mercy you show! Keep me from looking down on my brothers and sisters. Help me, like Levi, to hear your call, to follow you humbly, to live by faith with you, and to experience the blessed changes you want to see happen in my life. Amen.