

HANGING AROUND WITH TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS

Marc Gibson

Jesus did not associate with the right type of people – this was the considered opinion of the religious elite of His day. It wasn't as though Jesus did not spend time with the ones who considered themselves religious and quite important, but he **also** spent time with those types who were not acceptable in the elite circles. He hung around the outcasts and rejects, those that had been judged as unworthy of the association of the proper and respectable circles of society.

Examples of this are numerous. Consider the fact that Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to follow Him, and then sat to eat in Matthew's house in the company of *"a large number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them"* (Lk. 5:27-29; Matt. 9:9-10). The scribes and Pharisees did not look upon this kindly and murmured to Jesus' disciples, *"Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"* (Matt. 9:11). Jesus responded, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick...for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"* (vv. 12, 13). Jesus associated with sinners and outcasts because they needed Him and the gospel message. As was so often the case, *"the common people heard Him gladly"* (Mk. 12:37).

On another occasion we are told that *"all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'"* (Lk. 15:1-2). Jesus responded with the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son. While they were condemning, He was seeking the lost. Jesus also stated this as His goal on the occasion of His visit to the house of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who desired to live righteously (Lk. 19:1-10). And let

us not forget the woman who was considered a sinner that Jesus allowed to anoint, kiss, and wash His feet with her tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee. While Simon could only look on in contempt at the woman, Jesus saw a penitent heart and forgave her sins (Lk. 7:36-50). Consider also what a moment it must have been when Jesus *touch*ed that leprous man and cleansed him (Matt. 8:1-4). Jesus reached out and touched the people that others would not dare to touch physically or socially. Why? They had souls that needed to be touched with the gospel.

Jesus in no wise condoned the sins of those whom He spent time with. He sought to turn men from sin to live lives of righteousness. He could not do this, though, if he did not associate on some level with them. We must seek to draw all men to the gospel regardless of age, race, or social and economic status. Don't be afraid to spend time with them. They need Jesus, too.