

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A THUG GETS SAVED?

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Mark 2:13-17

Earlier this year, you will remember that one of the most notable Falcons' players was allegedly caught with a water bottle of questionable substances. The media then labeled him a thug. What is a thug? The word comes from an Indian word which means thief or villain. One of the most popular rappers, Tupac Shakur, popularized the word "thug." In today's society, a thug is a gangster, thief, hoodlum, etc. Many of us will agree that our black men have been unfairly labeled as thugs. You shouldn't judge a book by its cover but if you act like a thug you will be judged like a thug. It is thugs to whom we are called to minister. Thugs are whom Jesus came to seek and save.

In the text, the people of the land couldn't get enough of Jesus but the church people couldn't stand him because his actions convicted their hypocrisy. Jesus came to earth to show us how God wants us to operate as His people. In the text, they wanted to know why he would forgive the sinners and eat with them. Levi worked for Rome as a tax collector. The people reluctantly paid taxes to Rome. The tax collectors, including Levi, were robbing the people by keeping the excess for themselves. In today's society, we would call them thugs. Levi was not welcomed in the synagogue. He wasn't allowed to pray among the people of God because they didn't consider him worthy to come into the house. That is how some of us treat others today. Some of us have also been treated that way.

Levi was a member of the group that was set apart to worship and serve God. **Numbers 3:6** The name Levi means join. It is difficult to see our family members living the thug life failing to have the privileges that God set them apart for. Some people get caught up in a lifestyle that they really don't want to be in. They are just doing what everybody else is doing. Every person was made in the image of God and chosen for a lifestyle of worship and service of God. Everybody living outside of God's will is living a miserable life. Things don't matter when you don't have God. There is no amount of money or drugs that can satisfy anyone. Jesus called Levi to a new life in Christ. Levi didn't take time to think about it. He just got up and followed Jesus. Jesus is always looking for an opportunity to invite someone into relationship with God. He expects us as radical disciples to be sensitive to opportune times to invite people to Christ. **Colossians 4:5-6**

The one that everyone despised is the one that Jesus went after. Levi gave up everything. This is the expectation of a Christian although it does not always happen that way. Levi left his old life to follow Jesus. The truth of the matter is that we like to do it in increments. We like to think we don't really need to give up anything. Usually by the time we give it up it has already done us in. **Luke 7:40-42** Some of us think we can be cool with our praise because in our minds it doesn't take all of that. We love to compare our sins to other people's sins. We like to look down on others to make ourselves feel higher. We like the idea of thugs because we don't consider ourselves to be as low as thugs. However, the truth

is, all of us have been thugs at one time in our lives. When you lived the life of hell and God saved you, you forgot that you needed to live for Him. When a thug gets saved, he or she is forever grateful. A thug burns bridges to cut off that old life because he or she realizes that bridges allow you to go back. When a thug gets saved, they bring their friends. Some us have climbed out of holes and left people there. A thug introduces his friends to Jesus. You need to learn how to make a clean break and bring your friends with you.

Why did Jesus eat with thugs? God's people can be so prejudiced and judgmental. Grace is unmerited favor. We think that there are people who are beyond saving. How can that be if God saved us? Had it not been for Jesus, we would not be in the position we are in today. Some of us want to change church into a social club. It is not a social club or a school of the elite. It is a hospital for the sick. You can't get help and healing until you are ready to admit that you have some issues. All of us have issues. We have to get honest and realize that Jesus is into thugs.

Peace.