

Luke 15:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

Analysis

Luke sets the context: 'Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him' (Ἦσαν δὲ αὐτῷ ἐγγίζοντες πάντες οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἀκούειν αὐτοῦ). The imperfect tense 'engizō' (ἐγγίζοντες, were drawing near) indicates continuous action—outcasts habitually came to Jesus. Tax collectors (τελῶναι, telōnai) were despised as collaborators with Rome and extortioners. 'Sinners' (ἁμαρτωλοὶ, hamartōloi) included prostitutes, the ritually unclean, and Torah-violators. Their attraction to Jesus demonstrates His radical acceptance and the gospel's appeal to those aware of their need. This gathering provokes the Pharisees' criticism (v.2), setting up three parables about God's joy over repentant sinners.

Historical Context

First-century Jewish society maintained strict social stratification. Pharisees avoided contact with sinners to preserve ritual purity. Tax collectors worked for Rome, collecting levies and tolls, typically overcharging to enrich themselves. Their collaboration with pagan occupiers made them traitors in Jewish eyes. That Jesus welcomed such people scandalized religious leaders and raised questions about His righteousness. Yet this pattern fulfilled His mission statement: 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5:32).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does the fact that outcasts were drawn to Jesus while religious leaders opposed Him reveal about authentic gospel ministry?
2. How should contemporary churches evaluate whether they attract sinners seeking grace or primarily appeal to the self-righteous?

Interlinear Text

ἦσαν	δὲ	ἐγγίζοντες	αὐτοῦ	πάντες	οἱ	τελῶναι	καὶ
drew near	Then		him	all		the publicans	and
G2258	G1161	G1448	G846	G3956	G3588	G5057	G2532
οἱ	ἁμαρτωλοὶ	ἀκούειν	αὐτοῦ				
G3588	sinners	for to hear	him				
	G268	G191	G846				

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 1:15 (Sin): This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Ezekiel 18:27 (Parallel theme): Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.