

Mark 2:13-17

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[0:00] So we've been moving through, we've been seeing the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He comes out, he's in Galilee, he's been baptized, he begins establishing his authority as he's tempted! and establishes his authority over Satan, as he drives out demons, as he heals paralytics and cleanses lepers.

We saw in the beginning of chapter 2 that he has returned to Capernaum. For a while he was out in desolate places because of the healing of the leper. He's returned back to Capernaum and now here at the beginning of our story we see him again back out beside the sea.

Now Capernaum is located close to the sea. It's a port town and the Sea of Galilee is on the northwest. Capernaum would have been on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee.

And so that's where he is back out by the sea and there's again a massive crowd that's following him. We've said repeatedly that this crowd was not necessarily following him from genuine faith. In fact, more than likely not. We see a very, very few faithful followers of Christ after his crucifixion. As they're waiting for his resurrection, the number we count in the beginning of Acts is 120.

[1:10] And here we see thousands and thousands of people following him. More than likely because of the miracles. Because he was doing something fantastic and they wanted to see it.

Or they themselves had some infirmity that they wanted healed. So again we see a crowd following him. And I'll just point out to you once again his ministry.

The ministry that God gave him of teaching. So he's teaching them we see at the beginning of verse 13. Verse 13. Remember the very thrust of Jesus' teaching.

Even as we get further into the Gospel of Mark and we begin to study the parables and all these different facets of what he's teaching. Remember the primary thing that he's teaching is the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Right? Back in chapter 1, verse 15. He says that he came out of Galilee, into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

[2:07] Repent and believe in the Gospel. So we can, with surety, say that in some way he was teaching this very same thing. As we see him here walking alongside the seashore and teaching this crowd.

And in verse 14 we see that he passes by a man named Levi. Levi. Now it's interesting, the record here is that he's Levi, the son of Alphaeus.

We know that the Apostle James was also the son of Alphaeus. So would this be then James' brother Levi? And who is this Levi? He's not listed in the account of the Apostles in other places in the Gospels.

And there's a bit of debate about this, but most people agree that this Levi is the Apostle we know as Matthew. Now I won't get into the argument. I thought about it.

It's not worth the time. Because most people agree that this is in fact Matthew. One author said that much ink has been spilled over determining if this is in fact Matthew.

[3:09] I like the way J.C. Ryle put this. He's a well-respected 19th century evangelical Anglican bishop and commentator. He said, The person who is called Levi at the beginning of this passage is the same person who is called Matthew in the first of the four Gospels.

Let us not forget this. It is no less an apostle and an evangelist whose early history is now before our eyes. So I think with fair certainty, we can't say definitively, but with fair certainty we can say that this is Matthew.

In this day, most people had some form of nickname, often a Hebrew name and a Gentile name, which would have been sort of a nickname for them. For example, Simon Peter.

Jesus gave him the name Peter. His name was Simon and he was sometimes called Cephas. If you recall, he was mocked a bit by Paul using that name.

His Greek slang name being Cephas. And so the probability here is that this is in fact one of his other names of the apostle that we know as Matthew.

[4 : 12] Matthew. So let's assume that together. That's what we're looking at. And he was a tax collector. We see that he was sitting at the tax booth. And some of your translations may say toll booth by the seashore.

So he was likely collecting admission for passengers headed to Capernaum. So who were landing on the seashore, had sailed across the Sea of Galilee and headed into Capernaum. He was charging them a toll.

And he would have been doing this as an agent of the Roman Empire. Collecting money for Rome. For their governance. For their war effort. You know Rome marched themselves across the known world conquering people.

And that's what these dollars were going to. These men were crooked in nature. The tax collectors. The toll collectors were. Because the way they were paid is they were allowed to exact a charge above and beyond the actual toll charge.

Rome didn't care as long as they got the cut that they had required of that particular trade route or port. They could collect above and beyond that. And so these men lined their pockets by charging more than was necessary.

[5 : 21] That was the arrangement that they had. Furthermore, having been working for Rome, he would have been absolutely despised by most Jews. Remember, Rome was ruling over them.

So he was a traitor in their sight. The tax collectors, you see them commonly named amongst sinners throughout the New Testament. Because they were very, very disliked.

Notice here that as he's traveling along, it says, And as he passed by, he, being Jesus, saw Levi sitting at this booth.

It doesn't say that Levi was following him. It does not say that Levi sought him out. But here we see our great Lord seeking out Levi.

Luke 19, 10. Jesus says of his ministry that what he came to do was to seek and to save the lost. Jesus seeks out and finds his lost sheep.

[6 : 24] And the sheep follows him. John 10, verse 27 says, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. So we have to pause at this and look at the efficacious call of our Lord.

The Lord calls and Levi responds. He simply says to him, Follow me. He works in him the ability to do so.

And Levi gets up and follows. And I love Mark's punctuality at this point. We've talked a bit about how he's so brief. And he runs us through stories so quickly.

And in this case, I absolutely love. Jesus says, follow me. And the record is, and he rose and followed him. He left behind his profession that he was doing quite well at. Any of these men would have been incredibly wealthy doing this service for Rome.

And he stands up and he walks away from it. Remember who this person is. This Matthew leaves everything to follow Jesus. Some 60 years or so later, writes the Gospel of Matthew.

[7 : 31] Follows Jesus to the grave. Experiences all of this. Writes the Gospel of Matthew. And is later, we think, martyred in Ethiopia. That's the prevalent rumor that he was martyred in Ethiopia.

He leaves behind fame, success, fortune, and follows Christ. And this is a great work of grace in his life. You don't see a record here of him debating this.

He doesn't go, this man seems pretty amazing. Healing people. And I'm kind of liking his teaching. I'm going to follow him around a little while and get a feel for what he's got going on. I'm going to have a chat with him and see what he may promise me if I follow him.

If this is the Christ, the one who's come to reign, I want a prominent place in the kingdom. Let me go see if I can get on board with what he's doing. He had, by the world's measure, everything he could want.

And Jesus walks by and says to him, follow me. And his heart is turned. And he does just that. What a precious view of the sovereign work of grace in a person's life.

[8 : 38] And so it would seem, we find in verse 15, that we see the record that Jesus is now reclining in his house. At table, it says. And so it's likely that as he followed him, he said, please come to my place.

I have a house. And we can fill it with people. We see that many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many who followed him.

And again here we see some debate. It could be that these tax collectors and sinners were those who followed Jesus. Or they were ones who followed Levi. Levi. Right? That he was already working as an evangelist.

Right? We don't know exactly who this pronoun applies to. But all the same, we see them have a feast together at this table. And the record is that we find him at home with Levi reclining at table. Now, just to explain to you a little bit, tables of this day, they would have been low tables. People would have sat on three sides of them. One side was left open conveniently for serving at the table. [9 : 41] Servants would bring food to the table and you didn't have to reach over somebody's shoulder. It would be kind of nice this day, wouldn't it, if we had the opening at the end? Maybe like our booths, our modern day booths. People can serve food in that way.

And they reclined on couches that were at about a ten degree angle. And they actually sloped in towards the table. And they laid with their heads towards the table. And it was proper for them to prop themselves up on their left arm so they could use their right hand to eat.

This seems like a miserable way to eat to me. This sounds so uncomfortable. I can't tell you the last time I laid on my stomach. No, thank you. Right? But this is the way they spent time together.

They reclined together in this way. And the significant thing about the fact that he's in this place, this was the normal way that they ate food, but the fact that he was doing this was an intimate thing.

You reclined at table with people that you had relationships with. And this is where we find our Lord. The one, Jesus Christ. The one who is without sin.

[10 : 41] Who does he choose to spend his time with? He spends his time with tax collectors and sinners. That he might advance the gospel. The one who is without sin. The one who is without sin. The one who is without sin.

The one who is without sin. The one who is without sin. Now there's a sort of common phrase. I actually hope some of your minds were drawn to it immediately as I made that point about Christ. And people pull this phrase from John chapter 17 and they say, we're called to be in the world, but not of the world.

Are you familiar with that? We're called to be in the world, but not of the world. And admittedly, this is something I have used as well. And I think the person who probably coined this, the language is incredibly close to what's happening in John chapter 17.

The high priestly prayer did so with the best of intention and probably meant the right thing as they coined it. However, I think most people fall off one of two sides when they think in these terms.

As living in this world as a redeemed person, they think I'm supposed to be in the world, but not of the world. And they either take it too far into licentious living, right?

[11 : 43] I'm supposed to be in the world, but not of the world. That's the way they tend to treat that, right? I'm supposed to hang out with sinners and in the act of doing so, they are continually worked into a more intimate relationship with these people who influence them and they themselves then sin.

It's the end result of this action together. And then there are others who say, yeah, we're supposed to be in the world, but not of the world. We're not supposed to be of the world.

And they therefore cut themselves off altogether from those who don't know Christ, right? They create these small little cultural subgroups. I actually think this is the side that we err to more often as evangelical believers.

And we quit associating altogether with the world. And so there's a tightrope as there is with so many things here to be walked. How is it that we are meant to follow Christ into his ministry, the way in which he ministered to those around him, as those who have been called to carry out his mission in this world?

Look at John chapter 17. I should have go there with me. We've got a couple of verses to look at, so it would be of benefit to us all to be there together. I want to revise this common phrase this morning.

[13 : 10] Whether or not you actually say it differently, that's okay. But that you think of it rightly is my hope in making a revision to it. John chapter 17, beginning in verse 14. This is the high priestly prayer.

This is the prayer that Jesus prays on the behalf of his apostles and the disciples that would follow preceding his crucifixion. This is Jesus praying to God, I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

There's the language. Not of the world. Verse 15. I do not ask that you take them out of the world. There's the in the world part. But that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. So we see him very clearly say, they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. But recognize that in this prayer, this is not the destination. He's not saying to God, make them not of the world.

[14:17] And now let's talk about the means by which that happens. The primary point of him saying this is to say, they're not of the world, therefore, they're being sent into the world. Right?

You see that? Verse 17. Sanctify the truth and the word of the earth. As you sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world. Right? Luke chapter 19, verse 10.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. So this is the very reason for which we are left in the world. As those not of it, we are sent into it.

And then his prayer for them is that we will be spared from the sin that we'll be exposed to. That we'll be sanctified or perfected in the truth. Right?

That we will remain not of the world as we're in the world. So let me suggest to you that we change the phrase in the world but not of the world to not of the world but sent into the world.

[15:12] Right? This is the calling of our lives. So, we've been set free from the passions of the world. The slavery of sin that controls sinful man.

And we've been given freedom in order to serve the world to the glory of God. Right? Look at what Jesus did with his time. Right? He's confronting here in chapter 2 in a number of ways the religious culture.

And that's what we're going to get to here in just a moment. The scribes of the Pharisees are all kinds of offended by this. Right? This Jesus in their minds, if he was the teacher he said he was, if he was in fact the Son of God, should have spent all of his time with them.

Right? That's where he should have dwelt. Sitting around having high-minded conversation with the scribes of the Pharisees, the great theologians of the day. But he instead finds himself reclining at table with tax collectors and with sinners.

Now this has all kinds of implications in our life. And in the time we have, I couldn't even possibly work it out. And I don't even know that I've completely worked it out in my day-to-day. What does it look like to spend time with sinners in this way?

[16:22] But we have to engage this world with the gospel of Christ. There's no debate in that part. Right? We're not supposed to get in huddles and avoid the world altogether.

Right? We're victorious because what of Christ has done for us. We're sent into the world. The gates of hell will not stand against the advance of the kingdom of God. That is what we are called to do.

To go in and to take over for the glory of God. And so many believers have their little rites and their rituals and their schedule and they include the lost world all together in the things of God.

This is not our calling, beloved. Galatians 5.13 says, For you are called to freedom, brothers. Given freedom. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another.

Paul is saying to us here that our freedom is meant to be used to serve the world. Right? Not to live in licentiousness. Right? Not to run off hanging out with all of our pals and living however we might because of grace but in order to serve the world.

[17:34] Again, a warning just as you're thinking about how do I engage a culture? How do I get involved? How do I recline at table with those who are sinners? 1 Peter 2.11-12 Peter says, Beloved, I urge you as soldiers of exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

So there you see that tightrope line of walking that we keep our conduct honorable but that these people do in fact see our good deeds. That they actually know who we are.

They can observe the work of God in our lives. And I hope this morning that we'll take a cue from Christ here as we see him reclining at table with the tax collectors and the sinners.

Verse 16 we see the scribes of the Pharisees. Some of your translations may say scribes and Pharisees. You can insert at this point we talked a bit about who these people were specifically last week but just insert at this point these were the this was the legalistic religious culture.

[18:50] These men were certainly apostate but they didn't think that they were. They thought that they kept God's law to a T. But they had failed to understand the point of God's law.

So they were self-righteous they were built up they were holy in their own minds and they asked this question to the disciples why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Now you remember the reason that Jesus was crucified was the charge of blasphemy. Because Jesus had said that he himself was God. And certainly that would be blasphemy if he wasn't.

If he wasn't God that would be the case. And so the constant effort of the scribes the Pharisees the Sadducees was to prove him to not be God.

Because then they had him on the charge of blasphemy. He said it and he said it again and again and again that he was the son of God. And so they continued to do this and they did so by accusing him of things that they thought were wrong.

[19:54] By their own set of rules that they thought God had commanded. And so here we see this this charge being railed against him that he would stoop so low to associate with these unclean men.

They had clearly categorized themselves. They were so much better as keepers of the law versus those that collect taxes and sin. And sinners is just a general.

There are tax collectors and a bunch of other sinners is all that's being said in this case. And so this is their attempt to continue to build evidence against him. Why is it that he is not the son of God?

Because look at the sin he lives in and Jesus in all of his wonderful profundity hears what they say and responds, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous but sinners. And I love that he doesn't actually address the charge. He doesn't even give them the time of day but says to them this is why I came to come into this world to save sinners.

[21:07] Now you see these two groups we see those who are well and the righteous we can think of those as one. He says basically the same sentence twice to give us more explanation of what he means by this.

Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. So these would have been people who would have been well in their own minds. Jesus here introduces himself as the great physician.

Certainly he's healed people who are sick. He could take that title for this reason but here he's speaking specifically of being a spiritual healer of making people's souls right.

So just think about our day of modern medicine. I'm sure you're thinking more about that these days than maybe other days you might. But how many people act and think as if they're well and they're not?

Because the reality of it is that none of us really are well. We may not be in the hospital or necessarily need a doctor at that time but you're all falling apart.

[22:12] The degradation is happening. Maybe the little guys are still getting bigger and growing up but those of you who understand what I'm saying right now, you are falling apart. We're all in some way sick.

How many of you have a very stubborn relative, maybe a dad or a grandpa, that will be so sick and will just refuse to believe that they're sick?

That person, that's somebody who's like, it sounds like they're going to turn inside out, they're coughing so hard and you say, why when you not go to the doctor and say, I'm not sick, this is just a little cough. Do you know those people?

I do. These are the type of men who certainly were soul sick, certainly were sinners, but not in their own mind.

You see them constantly comparing themselves. They knew that they were flawed, they knew that they weren't keeping the law perfectly, but they were constantly comparing themselves,

high-minded, setting themselves apart from everyone else.

[23 : 12] We're not like them. There's some 6,000 Pharisees at this time, and they were so much better in their own minds that they had earned this type of righteousness.

It's a self-given righteousness, an outward righteousness that they appeared to be doing quite well. We can be that way sometimes.

They trusted in themselves for righteousness. righteousness. In Matthew chapter 23, verse 27 and verse 28, Jesus hands out quite the indictment to the scribes and the Pharisees.

He says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. righteousness. Woe to you if you think that you can look to yourself for righteousness.

[24 : 15] If you think that you have any good in and of yourself, right? You are like these Pharisees and hypocrites. You are a whitewashed tomb, right? You've made yourself up all neat and pretty on the outside, but inside you're full of death.

That's what Jesus is saying here. And these are the men that deliver this accusation. How could he possibly eat with these men, these sinners, these unclean ones?

So we must recognize our sin, our sickness to see our need of a physician. I think a lot of you know that on Tuesday I threw my back out of place.

My lower back is one of the most miserable experiences of my life. I'm still, I'm rocking a lot today because I'm still a little uncomfortable as a result of it. I stayed bent in half for about 20 minutes before I could even straighten.

Spent just a couple of days laying on a heating pad. There was absolutely no avoiding the fact that I was in pain. I couldn't go, I'm alright, things are good. I wanted to throw up.

[25 : 19] I cried once. I sneezed, I sneezed, and it made me cry because it hurt so bad. There was no doubt of this, and so the very day I did it, I went to the chiropractor. There was no question in my mind.

Like Sam suggested it, I didn't go, well, I don't know, let's wait and see how this goes for me. I went, okay, alright, I'll make the call right now. I did, and I went, and it helped.

It certainly moved me along. We must recognize our need of the great physician. We must recognize that we have a sickness that we cannot heal ourselves.

We must be humble in this way. We must recognize that we have no good in us, nothing at all. And this is the great sickness of our soul. And that if we're to stand right before God one day in judgment, if we're to have any joy in life now, that we need Christ's righteousness.

That our source of health must come from someplace else. Remember Jesus' gospel call to repent and believe in the gospel. Repentance is carried along by humility.

[26 : 25] A proud person never asks for forgiveness, never admits they're wrong. Right? You must be humble in order to repent. And this is the very thing that Jesus Christ is calling us to.

To recognize who we are apart from him and respond in faith to the grace that he lavishes on sinners. Because that is who he came to save.

We were all once like Levi. You might say, well, I haven't been rich. You've been successful. You've had what this world can offer to you.

And you were happy to have it. And one day Jesus came along beside you and said, follow me. And by the spirit working in your life, you said, yes, sir.

And you got up and you followed him if you were found in him. And now he has sent us into the world the way he went into the world. You know, Paul gives us a little more severe example of this idea of sickness and health.

[27 : 29] There's a bit of an implication here, and I'm not saying that Jesus was flawed in his presentation at all, but there's a bit of an implication that if we're sick, maybe there's something we can do for ourselves. Maybe it's possible that we could do this for ourselves.

And I'll draw you back again to my back example. I was not popping my own back that morning. I needed a physician. Many places in the scripture that we see that we're actually dead.

This is the example given to us. This is what we see as Jesus brings out this indictment to the Pharisees that they're full of dead people's bones. In Colossians 2, verse 13 and 14, Paul writes, And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood

against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it, to the cross. These scribes of the Pharisees, or the scribes and Pharisees, stood in this very same place, dead in their trespasses, in the uncircumcision of their hearts.

And they desperately needed a physician. Desperately. But they were not willing to be humble. And we get to see that record all throughout the Gospels. All over the place we see scribes and the Pharisees hearing the Gospel message and rejecting it and rejecting it and rejecting it because they were so proud.

[29 : 02] For those of us who are in Christ, we can rejoice this morning and see that the record of debt was canceled that stood against us with all its legal demands, meaning our eternal punishment.

Like what was properly would have been given to us for our infinite sin was infinite death. Right? But this was set aside and nailed to the cross and we can rejoice in that great truth.

And now the response to that is to recognize that just as Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost, he has sent us into the world as high priestly! Prayer, and therefore we go and we share his goodness to us in Christ.

I hope you find yourself in that place this morning, that you can rejoice alongside me, that you can rejoice new alongside me, that you're not sitting there saying, I've heard this before. Yeah, I'm a redeemed one, good for me.

This should warm your heart, to remember who you once were, Levi, Matthew, sitting here successful, happy as he could be, and then his world got flipped upside down and he discovered true joy in Christ.

[30 : 09] To the point of death, he discovered true joy in Christ. You may find yourself this morning not in that place, having some doubt of that, finding that maybe you have built your righteousness on the things that you do, that you come to church, that you live in the south and grew up in a Christian home.

Most of us did. That you have a Bible and you read it occasionally. That when things are going real crummy in your life, you pray. Right before finals, lots of prayer happens. things. Right? And you hang your goodness on that. Right? And not that bad. Right? You hold yourself up to other people. You guys all have friends and co-workers that are way worse than you in your mind.

Right? Horrible messes. And so you're doing so much better. There's not a scale that will be judged upon. Right? You don't get up there and God says, eh, you're good enough.

I'm going to tip it that direction. Come on in. Right? You're either in Christ or you're not. Right? You're in Christ. He sees Jesus' righteousness.

[31 : 24] Perfect righteousness. That's what's required of us to stand in his presence. If you're not, the little bit, little pilfy righteousness of your own is not nearly enough to pay the infinite debt of your sin.

That's why, that is why Christ bore the wrath for us that we might trade these two things. Martin Luther called it the great exchange. He took our sin.

He gave us his righteousness. This is what happened on the cross. He perfectly suffered for the sins of the church. For those that he would efficaciously call, effectively call, is what that means. Right? Our sin has been expunged from the record. It's been cast as far as the east is from the west. Let us rejoice in that great truth.

And let us be active sharing that great truth with this world. We take the Lord's Supper together every Sunday here. And we do it as a climactic point.

[32 : 30] I hope it's that for you. We really work at leading you up to it. Right? To stop and pause and think about this work of Christ on our behalf. His body broken, his blood spilled.

There's symbols here. We don't believe in transubstantiation. We don't believe this actually becomes the body and the blood of Christ. Right? We don't believe that this in some way goes into your righteousness purse and you gain a little bit as a result of taking the Lord's Supper together. Right? That's heresy. But what we do believe is it's a good practice. It's as a symbolic thing for us to participate in together to remember the work of Christ on our behalf as well as the things he's promised to do and complete finally and fully.

And that's why we do it together. It only makes sense to take the Lord's Supper together though from a pure place, from a clean heart. Right? If you harbor sin in your heart in light of these great truths, what business do you have celebrating the death and the resurrection of Christ? It makes no sense. But if you're going to actually celebrate what he's done on your behalf, you ought to also ask that the Spirit would examine your life. Shed light in the dark corners, which we all have, that you might repent and believe once again.

[33 : 47] Turn from your sin and turn to God and take the Lord's Supper together with us. So I'm going to pray, men who are going to take the Lord's Supper, if you'll go ahead and move to those as I'm praying.

As we do before, we'll have our station set up and I just ask as you're prepared, come take the elements and partake of the Lord's Supper. Let's pray together. together.