

## JESUS CAME TO CALL SINNERS

Mark 2:13-3:6 (Key verse 2:17)

*On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

As usual, I want to start today's message by posing two questions to you.

**The first question is:** based on what we have learned so far in our study of Mark gospel, who was Jesus? Yes, Jesus was God in human form. We know this, because only God can drive out demons...only God can heal the sick, only God can touch a contagious leper and make him clean...only God can make a paralytic to walk again....and yes, as we learned last week.... only God has the authority to forgive sins. Jesus did all of these things which proves that He was indeed God in human form. Think about that for a moment!! The eternal and almighty God...the creator of the heavens and the earth...physically lived on earth as a man. It is mind blowing. **This brings me to the second question.** Why would God do this? Why would He lower Himself to take human form and come to live with people in this corrupt and fallen world? Humanly speaking, it just doesn't make sense. Aren't we too sinful for God to come to us? Is God not supposed to be angry with people and punish us for all the terrible things we do? **If this is true, then why did He come into this world?** Through today's passage, we will learn that it was because God loves and accepts all kinds of sinners. In fact, the reason He came to this world was to call specifically sinners to Himself. Sinners, like Levi...sinners like you and me. This is the good news of God! Let's accept it in our hearts today! Amen.

Let's look at verse 13. Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him and He began to teach them. After Jesus was done preaching, He left the crowd and walked along back to town. On His way, Jesus saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. Now Levi's job was to collect taxes from his fellow Jews. That does not sound too bad, right? No, it was very bad!!! In those days, to have become a tax collector, Levi had to turn against both his people and God. You see, in those days Israel was a colony of the Roman Empire. And as is the custom with colonies, the Romans forcefully extracted heavy taxes from the Jewish people. Understandably, Jews hated paying taxes to their oppressors. That is why they did everything in their power to oppose them. Yet, Levi on the other hand, decided to betray his own people and side with the Roman government. Yes, Levi worked against his own people by collecting taxes from them and then give it to the Romans.

If betraying his own people was not bad enough, Levi also abused his position of power to enrich himself. He did this by extracting additional taxes from his people. In other words, he would pay to Rome what they required. But then collect more taxes for himself. And if people refused to pay, he would simply instruct the Roman soldiers to beat them, imprisoned them and sell their belongings..... **Indeed, Levi was a ruthless and selfish man. But that is not all! He was also a godless man.** His motto in life was: "live without limits!! And do what I want, when I wanted and how I wanted." Consequently, he had many girlfriends, slept around with prostitutes, got drunk, sniffed cocaine, gambled, watched pornography, bought a big car and build a big house - yet despised anyone who asked him for financial help. **So people hated Levi. In fact, they despised him. So much so that whenever Levi walked down the street, they spit at him and angrily cursed him. In fact, if it was up to them, God could there and then rain down holy fire from heaven to consume Levi as just punishment for all the terrible things he did them and God.**

Ironically, at that time Jesus (who was God) was there physically present

with them. Then how did He treat Levi when He saw Him? Did Jesus bring down fire on Levi? Did He curse and spit at Levi like the other people? Look again at verse 14 'Follow me'.... Jesus told him. Hold on a minute. If Jesus is God, was He not supposed to have said to Levi: "Get away from me?!" For Levi was too sinful...too godless....too selfish and too wicked to follow Jesus..... I mean Jesus is God....then how can He associate with a man like Levi?! Yet, to our big surprise, among all the people who came to Jesus that day, the LORD decided to call Levi, the worst sinner, to follow Him. Indeed, this was something extraordinary, unexpected and controversial. **People tend to think that they are too sinful and have done too many bad things in life for God to associate with them. In fact, like the religious leaders and people of the time, many think that the holy God will drive them away and condemn them. Yet, through Jesus' calling of Levi, we can see that this is simply not true. Because, if Jesus could call someone like Levi to follow Him, then Jesus can call anyone, including you and me, to also follow Him.**

The question is, what does it mean to follow Jesus? Look again at verse 14. 'Levi got up and followed him'. For Levi to follow Jesus meant, actually getting up from his chair, quitting his job as a tax collector and physically following the LORD Jesus wherever He went. Wow, can you imagine that. One moment Levi was still stealing from Jews....committing sexual adultery.....snorting cocaine through his nose.....then the next moment, he found himself in the presence of God....being with Jesus.....listening to Jesus.....and talking to Jesus. Can you imagine that? Is that even possible!? Absolutely. For this is exactly why Jesus came into this world: to call sinners out from their ugly and depressing lives of sin into a new and better and brighter life with Him. Let's make no mistake about Levi's life.....he might have had a lot of money and seemed like enjoying a life of sin.....but the truth was that he was deeply unhappy and troubled at heart. In fact, I dare to say that he was desperate to get out of the mess of a life that he created for himself. That is why, he immediately responded to Jesus' call. **Can you see why Jesus' call to Levi was God's act of love for Levi? Then what about you and me? The truth is, we are no different from Levi. We are all selfish sinners stuck in a life of sin that we created over the years for ourselves....whether it is sexual immorality... selfish ambition... lust... depression.... anxiety... financial problems... family problems... or perhaps a combination of all of the above... the point is we need a Saviour to deliver us from our ugly and messy lives of sin. Jesus is that Saviour. And He is calling each one of us to follow Him. The question is: how do you respond to Jesus' loving call? Will you take action... like Levi? Will you also physically get up and walk away from your depressing life of sin... to instead follow Jesus and live a new life with Jesus. Just like Levi. Let's all make a decision today, to respond actively to Jesus loving call... by getting up from our lives of sin and from now on wholeheartedly follow Jesus. Amen!**

Amen!

Look at verse 15. (Read) Levi was very thankful to Jesus for calling him to a new life with God. Consequently, he invited Jesus and his disciples to his home for dinner. At the same time, though, Levi wanted others to also experience God's love and grace that Jesus lavished on him. So he invited other tax collectors and so called "sinners" (perhaps prostitutes and other dodgy characters of the time) to also come and have dinner at his house with Jesus. And they all were eating joyfully with Jesus. .... talking with Him and listening to Him. I am sure Jesus even cracked a joke that made everyone cry with laughter. When we consider that Jesus was God in human flesh, we cannot but be amazed. What a beautiful and encouraging scene! Where our God treated sinners with such love, respect and humility.

But not everyone was pleased with Jesus' behaviour. Look at verse 16.

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” To them it made absolutely no sense. If Jesus was God then He was supposed to avoid and reject Levi and his sinner friends. Not eat and associate with them. Let alone call them to follow him. Look at verse 17. Let’s read today’s key verse together. On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Jesus came to this world to call sinners like Levi and the others guests at his house. The religious leaders could not embrace them. Yet, the Holy God wholeheartedly embraced them. In fact, the very reason why He came to this world, was to call them to Himself without any reservation. Does this mean God ignores our sin? Not at all. Look again at verse 17. Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Jesus saw Levi as a sick patient. Sick, not with the corona virus. But sick with sin. The religious leaders thought that Levi was by nature a selfish, rebellious, lustful, indifferent and lawless man. The truth however was, that these were mere symptoms. Symptoms caused by the root virus - namely sin! Yes, just like the coronavirus these days are making people very sick – causing them to have fever, breathing problems and great pain – so sin makes us spiritually sick. It causes us to experience great anguish, anxiety and depression. It fills us with lustful desires, selfishness, greed, jealousy, anger and rebellion. The truth is God did not create us like this. Yet because we contracted sin from birth we are all sick with sin. That is why we too suffer from these symptoms, just like Levi. But the good news of God is that in Jesus, God has not remained separated from us by placing us in spiritual quarantine or kept his distance from us. **Rather God has come to a morally dirty and polluted world, infected with sin – AS A SPIRITUAL DOCTOR!! To heal sinners like you and me from our sins. And so restore the image of God within us. Yes, Jesus is our spiritual doctor. Amen!**

Now very interestingly..... and as we all know.... when a coronavirus patient successfully receives treatment, his or her body recovers. They no longer feel sick with fever or breathing problems or feel pain. They also become stronger and can once again live a normal life. The same principal applies to our spiritual condition. This truth is vividly illustrated through the very Levi in today’s passage. Do you remember what his life was like in sin? It was really so ugly, dirty and smelly. But do you know what happened to him after Jesus, the spiritual doctor treated him? His life was cleared up....transformed by the power of God to the point that He was chosen to write the first book of the New Testament in the bible; the gospel of Matthew. Yes, from being Levi a despised tax collector and source of anguish to others, to being Matthew the gospel writer and a source of blessing to the whole world. Because Jesus, the spiritual doctor, treated Levi’s sin problem. **This reminds me, of how Jesus also transformed my life. Like Levi I too once lived a godless life. Like Levi I too used to get drunk every second night, danced like a crazy person in dark night clubs until the early hours of the morning, committed sexual adultery, vandalised other people’s property, watched pornography, uttered many swear words in one sentence, disrespected my father and mother, all while being unable to keep the simplest of jobs. You see, I was too proud to be a waiter or a shipping clerk or a factory worker....Yet at the same time I was paralysed with fear to apply for any other job. What a burden I was to those around me. At the time, I did not know why my life was in such a mess. But looking back based on today’s passage, it is quite obvious. I was deeply sick with sin. And I desperately needed a spiritual doctor to heal my sin sickness. I really thank the LORD Jesus for coming into this world to call a dirty and undeserving sinner like me. I deserved to be rejected by God. I deserved to be condemned to eternal hell. Yet, the LORD in His goodness and love saw me as I sat in my despair and in 2007**

**called me also to follow Him. I am still very sinful. But if I compare my life now to what it was like 13 years earlier, I cannot but testify to Jesus’ healing power. He transformed me from a directionless drunkard into His servant who can love and serve others. This is who God is. He loves sinners. He calls them, sits with them, talks with them, listen to them and treats them....with so much patience, love and humility. Unlike any doctor anywhere in the world. Today, let us all respond to Jesus’ call to follow Him with all our hearts. Amen!**

Briefly, before we conclude and based on the rest of today’s passage, let’s clear up one miss-conception people have about what it means to follow Jesus. The miss-conception is that to follow Jesus means to be very religious, just like the Pharisees and teachers of the law. For example, to keep their faith pure they fasted a minimum of twice a week. They also added so many additional rules to God’s law, especially relating to the Sabbath. For example, they classified picking heads of grain as work and prohibited people from doing so on the Sabbath. They even regarded healing someone on the Sabbath as work and was prepared to kill Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath. These religious leaders might have been very religious, but they practiced their religion without God in their lives.

But this is not the kind of life Jesus calls us to when He invites us to follow Him. ....simply keeping rules and laws. Instead, He calls us into a personal relationship with God. **To follow Jesus** is to engage with Him like Levi and his friends. They sat down and ate dinner with Jesus. **To follow Jesus** is to be like guests of a bridegroom at his wedding and so enjoy spending time with the LORD. **To follow Jesus** is to be like the disciples who freely pluck some heads of grain with Jesus to fill their empty stomachs. **To follow Jesus** is to be like the man with the shrivelled hand who experienced the great power of God in his life. This is an exciting and new life that Jesus calls us to. A life where you can hear the voice of God speaking to us through His word. A life where we can vividly experience the presence of the living God when you close your eyes and pray. I life where you too, just like Levi, are being transformed by God’s almighty power. **Indeed, to follow Jesus is to stand in a personal relationship with the living God. Amen.**

**In conclusion.** You and I are no different from Levi and his tax collector and prostitute friends. We are all, without exception, utterly sinful. Indeed, as Jesus explained we are in fact sick with sin. Not only does sin distort the image of God within us but also separates us from Him. But the good news of God is that the LORD came into this world to call you and me to follow Him. He first calls us to leave our lives of sin behind to embrace a new life with Him. He then, like a spiritual doctor, treats our sin sickness until sin loses its power to distort and destroy our lives. All while He is eager to stand in a personal relationship with you and me. Wow! Our God is truly loving. He is truly very humble and so warm and kind. What about you....do you want to stand in a personal relationship with Him? Then respond to Jesus’ call today to follow Him in your life.

Now you might be thinking to yourself: “I want to follow Jesus but do not know how, because I can’t see Him?” However, we do not have to physically see Jesus in order to follow Him. Rather, we follow Him by responding to what He reveals to us in His word. Today’s passage is an excellent example. Though Jesus is not physically here today to call us to follow Him, we hear Him speak through today’s passage. Now, it is up to us whether we will turn from our live of sin to embrace a new life with Him in obedience to His word. If we do this, we are indeed following Jesus. But if we fail to respond, we are not following Him. It is obvious then, for us to follow Jesus we have to read and study His word in the Bible. And respond each time when God’s will is revealed to us. Therefore, as a ministry, let

us study His word daily. More than that, let us actively respond to His word in obedience. Amen!