

A Doctor for Sinners

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0 : 00] Our text this morning for the preaching of God's Word is found in Mark chapter 2. Mark chapter 2, you can turn there with me in your copy of the Scriptures, and we will begin reading in verse 13.

Five verses this morning, but there is much that God has to say to us in these five verses. Mark chapter 2. Verse 13.

May the Lord bless the preaching of His Word.

Let's hear that preached now together. We're blessed in the New Testament to have four different accounts of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each one of those writers has in his own way woven together the events of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection.

[1 : 46] Now, all of the writers had to be very selective of which events they wrote about. John says at the end of his gospel, perhaps with a bit of hyperbole, Jesus did many other things as well.

If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. So each writer had to be selective of which events they were going to write about.

But also selective about the order in which they arranged them. Sometimes they arranged them in a chronological order. But other times, more thematically, to drive home a certain point.

But Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us about the healing of the paralytic that we saw last week.

And immediately follow it up by the calling of Levi and Jesus eating with sinners.

And so I believe these two episodes in the life of our Lord are connected around the theme of forgiveness. You remember Jesus said to the paralytic that was lowered down on the mat, Son, your sins are forgiven you.

[3 : 02] And then he healed him with a word so that the Pharisees, and indeed everyone present, would know that he, Jesus, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sins.

The theme is clearly the good news that all of your sins can be forgiven. And that, by me, Jesus, who is God, and therefore has authority to forgive sins.

And now what follows in this call of Levi is to answer the question, well, just whose sins does Jesus forgive? And this is hugely important.

And Matthew and Mark and Luke will not let us miss it. It's not the righteous that he came to save, for as we'll see, there are none.

But it's sinners Jesus came to call. Now this is first seen in our text this morning in the calling of the likes of Levi to be his disciple.

[4 : 07] So what do we know about Levi? Well, the first thing, he's also called Matthew. He's the same man. And to be given two names was not something all that rare.

We think of Simon, who's also called Peter. In Matthew 9, Matthew records his call to be a follower of Jesus in his own words.

And when we compare Matthew's version with what Mark speaks of, of Levi, we see that they're the same person, the same situation.

So that's the first thing. This is Levi or Matthew. And Levi is not only called by Jesus to be a follower, but later on he's actually called to be an apostle, one of the 12 apostles, one of the sent ones, through which Jesus would hand his teaching to them, and their teaching then would become the foundation of the church with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

And it's this Matthew who was inspired to write the first of the four gospel accounts of our Lord. So this is Matthew, Levi, his name.

[5 : 31] But the surprising thing about Levi, when we first meet him, is not his name, but his occupation. And we're told that he was a tax collector. So let's dig in. Verse 13, we're told, Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake, and a large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.

Many villages were scattered along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and from them comes this large crowd, and he began to heal their sick. No, that's not what it says.

He began to teach them. And once again, we see that our Lord's main work was that of teaching and preaching the gospel. Indeed, his miracles were often joined to it, but they were supportive of his preaching, and often illustrations of the point he was preaching.

He's the prophet from heaven who comes to teach us the truth that we need to know, to expose the lies that are being taught about God, and sin, and self, and Christ, and the way of salvation, about judgment, heaven, and hell.

So he's teaching them. And verse 14 says, Then as he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. And here's where we learn of Levi's occupation.

[6 : 56] He collected taxes. Now, this is different from an IRS employee who collects your taxes to give to your government. Levi was a Jew in the service of King Herod.

So he was collecting taxes from his fellow Jews to pay to the occupying Romans who were ruling over them.

You see how different that would be. And so he was viewed as a traitor in collusion with the oppressor nation. And on top of that, it was easier to find hen's teeth than to find an honest tax collector.

And everyone knew it. They knew they took advantage of the people, charging whatever they could get away with, collecting more than what was due, and enriching themselves by it.

It's interesting when John the Baptist arrives on the scene and begins preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The different groups of people said, well, what should we do to repent?

[7 : 58] And the tax collectors were there and they were together hanging out. And they said, well, what should we do? And Jesus says, don't collect any more than what is due. You see, that was their sin.

And everyone knew it. And Jesus called them out on it. Or John the Baptist called them out on it. They must repent of the thieving that they were doing. So for all these reasons, tax collectors were despised and classed with the vilest of men, along with murderers, sailors, adulterers, prostitutes, the very worst of sinners.

They were a disgrace to their family. They were outcasts in Israel. Indeed, one source said they were even excommunicated from the synagogues. And yet Jesus wanted him and called him to follow me.

And then called him to be one of the twelve apostles whose teachings he would give and build his church upon and give him the assignment to write one of the four gospels.

And along with that call, follow me, went the authority of Jesus, the power and the grace of the Son of God that enabled Levi to answer that call.

[9 : 25] So the demanding call was answered with a radical response. The Bible says Levi got up and followed him. He got up from his tax booth. Luke says he got up, left everything, and followed him.

So he left the comforts of job security, of a lucrative business. He's willing to lose his life as he had planned it and instead to venture it all for Christ.

And he considered himself a gainer, not a loser for having done so. Great monetary loss, to be sure, but greater spiritual and eternal gains.

He lost what he could not keep, his life, to gain what he could not lose, eternal life. Did you ever went to the beach and tried to grab a handful of hot sand and you hold it in your hand and after a while you look and there's not hardly anything there.

It has a way of seeping out through all your fingers. That's what Jesus says for those who try to keep a hold of their life. I want it my way.

[10 : 41] And in the end, they lose their life. And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Well, he left everything and counted himself a gainer.

He was a money-loving man, but now he's counting Christ as his chief treasure, worth having, though it costs everything.

Now, you can be sure that that kind of a word would spread quickly through a small community like Capernaum, and it did. Levi's flipped. He's going off with the preacher from Nazareth.

And their jaws would drop when they heard it. No, you're kidding. Why would anyone do that? These jobs don't just fall into your lap every day. It's a profitable business. Why would he just walk away from it?

For what? And Levi would say for him, for the Lord Jesus Christ, he's worth it. And I want you all to come to my house and meet him for yourself.

[11:52] I'll throw a feast, and he'll be there, and you come too. I want you to meet him and bring your friends along with you. And like the four friends of the paralytic who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus.

So we find Levi here wanting to bring his friends to Jesus. You know, that's an evidence of salvation. That whenever someone gets to really know Jesus, they want others to know him as well. And Levi's friends showed up in great numbers. It must have... I don't know how the reason for why each one of them came, but perhaps some of them were wondering, who is this Jesus, and what is his love that for him, a man would be willing to leave everything and say, I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold.

I'd rather have Jesus than anything. Verse 15 tells us then, while Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

Now, I think probably it's true of most versions of the Bible that the word sinners is in quotation marks. Is that true of your version? What that means is this wasn't just your run-of-the-mill sinner, but this was a special category of sinners that folks were considering these people.

[13:28] They were putting them in this category of the worst of sinners, those with a notorious bad reputation, irreligious outcasts that didn't keep the commandments of God nor all the extra rules of the rabbis, the kind of people that good religious folk, you know, would just turn up their nose and keep their distance from.

And so these tax collectors, we see, find themselves in the same category and in the same company with sinners. They were birds of a feather.

And so we find them flocking together here at Levi's house. And what was the most galling of all is that Jesus and his disciples were eating with them. Galling, that is, to the Pharisees.

Now, the Pharisees are first mentioned by Mark here in chapter 2. We saw it last week, didn't we? They were out in force. And in their minds, they were condemning Jesus as a blasphemer for forgiving sins.

And we see in this, we're in chapter 2. It didn't take long for Jesus in his public ministry to run smack dab into stiff opposition from these Pharisees.

[14:53] We see them showing up here at Levi's house to condemn Jesus for his actions of eating with tax collectors and sinners. And they will be in view all the way through chapter 2 and on into chapter 3 until verse 6 when we read, Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill him.

So here again, the self-appointed religious police show up outside of Levi's house to accuse Jesus. Verse 16 tells us, 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?

They appear too cowardly to ask Jesus himself. And no wonder for that. He's just rebuked the very thoughts of their minds when they thought in their minds Jesus is a blasphemer.

And Jesus called them out on it, didn't he? Just in the event of the paralytic. And so, they don't have the guts to come and ask Jesus.

They instead ask the disciples about him. No doubt as well, wanting to shame these disciples for following such a master who has such a loose life as to eat with tax collectors and sinners.

[16:23] verse 16, when the teachers of the law who were, I'm sorry, these Pharisees then themselves would never sit at table with sinners like Jesus was doing, lest they would become contaminated, made ritually unclean by men who did not keep all the cleanliness rules, not just biblical ones, but the ones that they had added to it.

And you remember how from our study of the Pharisees, they had added hundreds and hundreds of rules to the ones that God himself had made.

Man-made rules. So here, they have categorized people into these two groups, the righteous and the sinner. The sinners. We'll see that in the next verse. The righteous are the good religious folk like themselves, the Pharisees, who claimed to keep God's laws and all the man-made rules as well.

Sinners, on the other hand, they didn't. They're lawbreakers. You remember in our study of the Pharisees how our Lord exposed their hypocrisy because they would excuse their own lawbreaking.

They had their ways around it, didn't they? Redefining the laws and adding certain words to make what they were doing right in their own eyes while condemning and despising all the others for their lawbreaking.

[17 : 53] The Pharisees' idea of holiness had a lot to do with separating themselves from others who were beneath them. It was a holier-than-thou religion.

And so, we righteous people are to have nothing to do with those sinners out there. Indeed, the Pharisees would be quite happy to let them perish and go to hell with no concern.

After all, they don't deserve the kingdom of heaven like we do. They'd written them off as unworthy of forgiveness. So, when our Lord at Levi's house ignores these self-righteous rules of separation, the Pharisees were offended.

He's eating with sinners. Shame on him. How could he do that? We're supposed to keep our distance from people like that? After all, there's a curse on them.

Well, let's be clear. Jesus was not hanging out with sinners in order to partake in their sins. There is a reason why we should seek out good friends.

[19 : 04] He walks with the wise grows wise while a companion of fools suffers harm. But Jesus isn't just coming among these sinners because he enjoys their sin. No, no, that's not at all what he's doing as they are implying in their charge against him.

No, Jesus comes among them to bring them out of their sin to himself that he might save them from their sin and forgive them.

Well, somehow or other, what the Pharisees had said about Jesus got to Jesus. Whether he overheard what they said or whether the disciples came and said, do you know what the Pharisees are saying?

They're wanting to know why you're eating with sinners. But verse 17 says, on hearing this, Jesus said to them, that is to the Pharisees, it's not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick.

I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners. You want to know why I'm eating with tax collectors and sinners?

[20 : 14] Because they're spiritually sick and need a doctor. And who's ever heard of a doctor who separates himself from the sick? No, if he's a doctor worthy of the very name, his whole purpose is to get near the sick in order to heal them.

And that's what I am. A doctor. The great physician of the soul. Sin-sick souls. And you are right that these people are sick sinners.

But that's precisely who needs the doctor. And that's why I'm eating with them. They need me. And I'm here for them. That's the very reason, in fact, why I've come.

Not to call the righteous, but sinners. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Now, how do you answer that? Well, you don't.

And once again, Jesus has cornered his critics with the truth and silenced them. Now, don't miss Jesus' heart for sinners in this.

[21 : 28] He says, I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners. sinners. This is the eternal Son of God explaining why He came into the world.

Messiah's mission for which the Father sent Him and for which the Son came. It's the reason He left the glories of heaven to come into a sin-sick world that had no cure for their illness.

It's the very reason He became a man and joined our human nature to His divine nature never again to be separated. It's why He became sin for us and went to the cross where He became a curse for us and was cursed by God so that by His wounds we might be healed.

It was to heal sin-sick souls. Calvin asks, why was He made a sacrifice and cursed if not but to hold out His hand to us cursed sinners?

Yes, we're cursed. That's why He had to be cursed in our place that He might save us sin-cursed sinners.

[22 : 39] And we've seen Jesus in the Gospel of Mark already healing many physical diseases. But in calling Himself a doctor, Jesus is here not thinking of our physical diseases but of our infinitely worse disease of sin.

The very worst physical disease, the very, the very, I should say, the very worst that physical diseases can do is to take you to the grave. But the disease of sin uncured will take you to hell forever.

It's far more dangerous, sin, than physical diseases. And Jesus is now talking about that.

We better have those sins forgiven, covered. And so He's the doctor who's come to do that. I've not come to call the righteous because there are none righteous.

I've come to call sinners because all have sinned. and come short of the glory of God. You know, as Paul will later say of self-righteous Jews who look down their nose at Gentile sinners, he says, are we any better?

[24 : 04] Romans 3, 9 and 10. Are we any better? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

As it is written, there is no one righteous not even one. Isaiah says, we all like sheep have gone astray. We each one of us is turned to his own way.

Our backs to God going our way. So, you see, Jesus would say, I've not come to call the righteous because there aren't any. There are only those who vainly imagine that they are righteous.

Children, you know, you have given to you an ability to imagine things. And maybe you've imagined as you just sit there and daydream when you're taking your nap and you're thinking, I have wings and I can fly.

And in your imagination, you take wings and you fly all over the place. But that's not reality. You are imagining that.

[25 : 15] You don't want to go to the top of the house and jump off and think that you can fly. You will come to reality real fast. Here are some people, these Pharisees, who are imagining that they are righteous, that they earned their way to heaven.

After all, they're better than others and they're not that bad. But it's all in their imagination. and reality will come crashing in on them when they face the real righteous one, Jesus Christ the judge. But this is the disease that often goes with sin, that men imagine themselves to be righteous when the Bible is clear, there is none righteous, no, not one.

And what they vainly imagine to be righteous is really nothing but filthy rags. in God's sight. Isaiah 64, verse 6.

Filthy rags. Psalm 36, 2 says, in their own eyes, they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sins. You see, in their own imagination, I'm it and I'm in.

[26 : 29] Because they compare themselves to others and can always find those who are worse than them. so Jesus is saying, you'd have me only hang out with those who are healthy, but the healthy don't need a doctor.

And you want me avoiding the sick? Well, then who is the doctor for? If not the healthy or the sick, why have I come? You see, suppose the next time you need a doctor and you go to the office and there's a sign on the door, if you're sick or unhealthy in any way, please stay out, only the healthy are welcome.

You'd be looking for another doctor. That's because doctors are for the unhealthy sick. Now, notice how clearly then Jesus displays the ignorance of these self-proclaimed teachers of Israel, the Pharisees.

First of all, they're so ignorant of Messiah's mission. Why the Christos, the Christ, the Messiah, has come? He's come as a doctor precisely to heal sin-sick souls, not to avoid them.

Yet, they think sinners are too unworthy of being forgiven. And secondly, they're ignorant of their own sin-sickness and need of Jesus, the only doctor that can heal him.

[27 : 51] They think they're healthy because they're certainly not as sick as the tax collectors and sinners. But they too are shot through with the same cancer of sin and unrighteousness.

You see, the ground is level at the cross. The cross really defines things well for us. You have the righteous one hanging on the cross and you have him dying, the righteous for the unrighteous. And that's all there is. We must take our place right beside that thief as unrighteous and receive salvation from the righteous one who dies in the place of and for the unrighteous.

We sing that song, the dying thief rejoice to see that fountain in his day and there have I as vile as he washed all my sins away.

That's the gospel. The ground is level at the cross. We come as unrighteous, unworthy, and we look to the righteous one, the only worthy one who's dying in the place of unworthy sinners, and we receive salvation.

[29 : 02] How great is the guilt of these religious leaders who despised and rejected their Messiah, Savior, and taught the nation to do the same. And that's why Jesus, when he looked on the crowd, saw them as sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless, and why he publicly rebuked the Pharisees.

because they were leading the nation to hell. I don't think it's a stretch to say that religion has damned more people than it's saved.

It certainly was that way in Jesus' day, because it was false religion, in which people were being told, if you're good enough, you can earn your way to heaven.

Just do this and don't do that. And while they were on their way to hell, they were being told they're on their way to heaven. And there's a lot of that religion in the world today.

Well, let me come to applications. The first application from this text is let no one then suppose that their own righteousness is good enough to get you into heaven. The Pharisees thought so.

[30 : 17] in fact, most of the people thought they were the ones that would make it to heaven because of how righteous and holy they were and how Jesus shocked them in that Sermon on the Mount when he says, I tell you the truth, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

For all that they show themselves to be, justifying themselves in the sight of men. They're detestable in the eyes of God, Jesus says.

You remember how Luke recorded that parable of Jesus? And he introduces the parable of Jesus, these are the words of Luke, to those who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down their noses on everyone else.

Jesus told this parable. And then you remember in the parable, there were just two men. One was a Pharisee and the other was what? A tax collector.

Here they are again, the same two that we meet at Levi's house. And Jesus has something to say. They both went in the temple to pray. And the Pharisee, he's a regular there.

[31 : 28] He's there all the time. So he stands up and prays and he says, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, adulterers, robbers, or even like this tax collector over here.

No, I tithe. Everything that I get and I fast. You see, he's all about himself.

I'm good to go to heaven. I don't need a savior. And then this tax collector prays. He's not a regular there. For some reason, he's there that day and he's under conviction of sin.

And he will not so much as look up into heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I'm the sinner. So you have the sinner and then you have this so-called righteous man.

And then Jesus drops the bomb on his hearers. Which one do you think went home right with God? Not the Pharisee, but the tax collector, not the religious.

[32 : 36] respected man, leader of Israel. But the despised, despicable, scumbag tax collector who saw himself for what he was, confessed it.

I am the sinner you have been speaking of. Have mercy on me. He doesn't have one good thing to say for himself, but throws himself on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

Well, the self-righteous who think that they're healthy, healthy enough to make it into heaven, they must lose their puffed up opinion of self and acknowledge themselves to be hell deserving sinners or they cannot and will not be saved.

It's only those who know themselves to be sick who will throw themselves upon the doctor. It's only those who know themselves to be condemned sinners who will seek mercy of God in Christ, the only Savior for sinners.

Have you? Have you done that? Is that your only plea, your only hope? You know, there was a question Evangelism Explosion would ask in their presentation of the gospel.

[33 : 49] If you should die and appear before God in heaven and he would say, why should I let you into my heaven? And if your answer begins with because I, you've missed the gospel.

It's not because I. because I did this, I didn't do that. No, the only right answer for heaven is because Jesus, because he came and lived the perfect life I couldn't and he died the death I deserve, death under the wrath of God to turn away that curse and wrath from me. It's all because of Jesus. Well, that's the first lesson. Don't let anyone think that your own good goodness will ever get you into heaven. And then secondly, let none think you're too sinful to be forgiven.

Now, isn't it something how the devil tells both lies? He tells some people, oh, you're good. You don't need to worry about this salvation, Jesus stuff. No, you haven't killed anybody. You haven't robbed. You're ready as you are to get into heaven. And then he'll turn around and tell other people you're so sinful that you can never be forgiven. Well, which is it, Satan? [35 : 07] Well, he'll play both ends, you see. Sometimes with the same person. Well, let none think you're too sinful to be forgiven. You fear you've out sinned God's mercy?

You fear you're beyond redemption, that you're too sinful to be healed of your wayward. Exhibit one. Look at Levi. Here he is, this thieving tax collector. Jesus called him to himself and made him his disciple, an apostle, a writer of the gospel. You know, a tax collector's booth was the most unlikely place to recruit apostles of Christ. I could think of hundreds of places that were better than a tax collector booth. But that's where Jesus found him. And he ensured that he had one out of the twelve who was a low down tax collecting sinner.

And in calling him, Jesus was sending a message to the worst of sinners. There's more grace in me than there could be sin in you. [36 : 12] Look at Levi. I came to save him. It's the same thing with Saul of Tarsus, wasn't it? That's that self-righteous Pharisee who who who persecuted Christians.

Blasphemer and violent man. And he later writes, here's a trustworthy saying that deserves to be accepted by all. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I'm the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display the whole of his patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. If he can save me, the worst of sinners, he can save anyone. He can save you. That's what Jesus is sending this message in this text in saving Levi and making him an apostle.

But he says it again by eating with these tax collectors. He's he's he's showing us why he's this is the very reason I've come from heaven. And he's still calling sinners to himself today. That's the glory of the gospel. Come to him. Trust him. This doctor turns none away. None who are too far gone in sin.

[37 : 33] He'll forgive your transgression and remember them no more. He's authority on earth to forgive sins. Yes, the sins of the very worst sinners. How?

Because he. The doctor was wounded for our transgressions. He. The doctor was crushed for our iniquities. And the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds, we are healed. What a doctor. What a gospel. What a salvation. Offered to the worst of sinners.

The third lesson is this is a call to repentance. Luke Luke account. Luke's account makes it explicit. I've not come to call the righteous. Jesus said, but sinners to repentance. Yes, he went into the worst of sinners with his gospel.

But he didn't offer them a gospel that would forgive their sins and then let them just sin with impunity. No, no. No, he offered them forgiveness upon repenting.

[38 : 38] Upon turning. They've been living their whole life without the Savior. And he said, you need to repudiate that to repent of it and say that was wrong. I need you, Jesus.

And I see it now and I trust in you. He came to call sinners to repentance. And that's where we find Jesus as the double cure, both from the guilt and the power of sin.

Well, the last lesson is for believers. Jesus came to seek and to save sinners. That's why I ate with them. Are you bearing his likeness more and more in that regard?

Are you a friend of sinners? sinners like Jesus was? Are you more like Jesus or more like the Pharisees? Do you keep your distance and just look down your nose and let them perish?

Or do you move toward them with pity and compassion? Trying to bring them to Jesus, realizing you, too, are a sinner. And but for the grace of Jesus.

[39 : 41] Christ would perish in hell. Well, that's the image of Christ being seen in his people. We see it here in Levi.

And so may we find that same heartbeat of our Savior. Next week's Evangelism Sunday. Who can I invite?

Who can I bring to hear about my Savior? Well, the invitation is still going out. It's Jesus Christ is present with his word preached wherever it happens today.

He's here today by his spirit and he's calling, offering full and free forgiveness for all who will repent and come to him. Pray with me.

We thank you, Father, for this passage in our Lord's life that teaches us such eternal lessons that, yes, Jesus is able and willing to save and that only he can save helpless sinners like us, that we all belong in that category.

[40 : 50] There's none righteous. Oh, make it clear to one who thinks otherwise today. And then don't let the devil's lie hold up anyone from coming to you to think that they have out sinned your mercy and are too sinful to be saved.

Thank you for Levi. Thank you for Saul of Tarsus. Thank you for all of us who've been saved. Lord, we too were sinful and needing a Savior.

Thank you, Jesus, for being cursed in our place. Draw others into your fold and send us on our way. Rejoicing and telling others what Jesus has done for us and what he will do for them.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.