

“Just Who Do You Think You Are?” – Mark 2:1-17

In First Corinthians, there is an intriguing passage that always makes me go “hmmm”.

But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

That’s a classic good news/bad news statement! Paul recognized that there was a great opportunity in Ephesus to win people to Jesus Christ, but at the same time, there were many who would stand in his way. It’s just the way it is. Whenever and wherever you are called to bear fruit for the kingdom, you will also find opposition. There will be scoffers. There will be persecutors. There will be agents of Satan who will demand to know what gives you the right to share the good news of Jesus Christ. There will be those who demand to know, “Just who do you think you are?”

Jesus said:

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (John 15:20)

As Jesus conducted His ministry of preaching, relationship and service, He encountered many adversaries and the most shrill of these were the religious elite, individuals who should have expected Messiah to come, individuals who should have celebrated His appearance, individuals who should have bowed down before Him. But instead, they responded with “Just who do you think You are?”

Let’s go to our text for this morning, Mark, Chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

Read Mark 2: 1-17

The first scene in this passage is a familiar one. How many flannelgraph Bible stories have been shared with children about the paralytic who was dropped through the roof? It certainly demonstrates how desperate this man and his friends were to get an audience with Jesus. And it demonstrates his faith that the Lord could help him. But with all due respect to all those Sunday School teachers over the years, to focus on this poor paralytic would cause us to miss a very important point.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." (Mark 2:5)

That, my friends, is the most important thing Jesus can do for anyone. That is our most fundamental need. This man’s most important need was not to be cured of his paralysis. Your most fundamental need is not financial. It is not medical, either. It is not your broken family relationships or your struggle with various addictions. Our greatest need is forgiveness.

We are sinners! That is our greatest problem because it is an eternal problem.

*As it is written: "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE; (Romans 3:10)
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)*

Because God is holy and perfectly righteous, every sin, no matter how trivial it might seem to us, must be punished. And ...

... the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23a)

Now, Mark doesn't give us the details of the Word that Jesus was preaching to these people but I have to believe that our sinful depravity must have been part of the message. We need to be rescued from our sin. We need to be saved and only Jesus can save us!

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Jesus can forgive your sins because He paid for your sins. He went to the cross to bear the wrath of Almighty God in your place.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus can forgive your sins because He is God. Yet even He had adversaries.

And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, (Mark 2:6)

Okay, there were scribes among the people gathered there. Remember, they are the experts in the Law. They were likely Sadducees. We talked about them last week ... they were part of the religious elite. They had a problem with Jesus forgiving this guy's sins. But notice, that they didn't say anything. They were just "reasoning in their hearts". In other words, they were just thinking about it.

"Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7)

Right! Nobody can forgive sins but God alone. Jesus is God.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.** (John 1:1)*

So, they were right in their second question, but wrong in the first. They did not recognize who Jesus was. He is not just a Man; He is the God-Man. The first way Jesus demonstrated this is that He knew what they were thinking.

But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? (Mark 2:8)

I could spend quite a bit of time explaining how Jesus perceived this, but let's just notice that He was operating in concert with His Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit. The important thing is that He knew what they were thinking. And He was going to do something that really should have brought them to faith.

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." (Mark 2:9-11)

And he did. Immediately. (Mark's favorite word.) It blew their minds. And the people glorified God for it – an appropriate response. But did they all come to faith? No. Some folks are just predisposed to unbelief. It's sad. Sometimes it actually causes me to weep. But there are some people that, because of their education, or their position, or maybe because of their theological tradition, are just incapable of accepting the truth when it's right there in front of them.

Don't you be one of them!

Now the scene shifts. Jesus leaves the house, which was probably His Capernaum headquarters, and wanders down by the sea. Of course, He's teaching everyone who came to Him. But then, He passes a tax booth.

Now, in our day and age, if you get a letter from the IRS, it probably will cause your heart rate to rise a bit and if you have to sit down with an IRS agent, I suspect that your anxiety level would rise. Nobody likes a tax collector. But in that culture, it was even worse. Tax collectors were Jews who entered into a contract with the Roman government and they worked on commission. The more they collected, the more they made. If they padded the tax bills a little bit, the Roman government didn't care as long as they got their share. So, these guys were considered to be crooked turn-coats, traitors to the Jewish people. And they generally made quite a bit of money.

As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. (Mark 2:14)

Two quick comments: First, notice that Levi immediately left his tax office and followed Jesus. That's the only reasonable response. When Jesus calls, you really have to go. When He calls you to salvation, you have to respond. When He calls you to ministry, you must be obedient.

But secondly, I need to let you know that the tax collector was known by a couple different names. This Levi was also known by the name of Matthew. He wrote the Gospel that is called by his name. How many Christians over the years have been so richly blessed by the account this Apostle wrote? Isn't it just like God to call the least likely candidate to bear fruit for the Kingdom?

Levi wanted to bless Jesus so he threw Him a party. It was quite a shindig. In Luke's account, we read:

Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. (Luke 5:29)

Levi invited all His friends. He wanted them to meet Jesus. Would you like all your friends to meet Jesus? Do they actually know that He is your friend?

Just wondering.

Of course, most of our friends are those we encounter in our day-to-day lives. Levi was a tax collector so many of his friends were tax collectors and probably other government officials. That stirred up a bit of a controversy.

And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30)

There is a little bit of an escalation in opposition here. Remember, with the paralytic, they were "reasoning in their hearts". Here, they confront the disciples. They're saying it out loud, but they still haven't said it to Jesus' face. (That will come later.)

Jesus' response is, I think, a little bit ironic.

When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Mark 2:17)

It is ironic because those scribes and Pharisees were not righteous. Well, maybe they were self-righteous, but they certainly weren't righteous in the eyes of Almighty God. They needed the Great Physician every bit as much as those so-called sinner people.

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one. (Psalms 14:2-3)

But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

Praise God that Jesus came to call sinners like me to repentance.

My friends, you must be born again. Jesus says:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

But that is not something you can do on your own. You are born again when the Holy Spirit brings you to saving faith. Faith is a gift granted by a gracious God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way you can be saved. So, pray for faith.

In John, Chapter 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

Jesus is referring to a strange incident recorded in the book of Numbers. As they wandered in the wilderness, the children of Israel became discouraged and spoke out against God and Moses. (Not just once, by the way.) God judged them for their sin of unbelief.

So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. (Numbers 21:6)

The wages of sin has always been death. Moses prayed for the people, that the Lord would forgive them and save them from certain death.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:8-9)

The bronze serpent represented sin. The pole represented the judgment of sin. It was sin on a stick and it was a strange event. But as Jesus explained, it looked forward to the cross. When Jesus was lifted up from the earth on that cross, He became sin for us. (Sin on a stick.) And anyone looking to Him in faith is saved from spiritual death and granted eternal life.

Have you looked with faith on the crucified and risen Jesus Christ? I so pray that you have.

"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

There are two types of people in this world. There are those who, like the scribes in our text this morning, are predisposed to unbelief. Those folks will simply not be confused by the facts. Though Jesus demonstrated His authority and His Godhood over and over again, they refused to believe. Their destiny is an eternity of suffering in the pit of hell.

But there are also those who are predisposed to belief, those who have placed or will place their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. If you belong to this category, Jesus guarantees an eternity of the most exquisite joy. You are a child of the King!

Jesus said:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

So, look upon Jesus, who was pierced and crucified for you. Declare Jesus as your Lord. Pray to Him, "Jesus, you are my Lord and my God! I believe ... help me with my unbelief. Increase my faith."

If you can pray that prayer from your heart, then you belong to Jesus. And if anyone asks you, "Just who do you think you are?" You can answer and say, "I am a child of the King of the Universe!"

Amen!