

God's Grace and Global Mission

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 October 2023

[0 : 0 0] Bibles again to Mark chapter 2. As we close our missions week, as we continue to ask ourselves the question, why does mission matter? We recognize we've looked at that from a number of different angles. Last week we were thinking about the reality that God has been on his mission for his glory from the beginning. We spent time in the middle of the week praying for unreached people.

We prayed for Scotland, which used to be reached and now needs to be reached again. On Friday we welcomed people in. We showed hospitality in Jesus' name. We've heard this evening about the needs of communities here in the UK and in Latin America. There are many reasons to help us to think about mission. But here's another one I want to think about.

And it's the invitations of Jesus that we find here in Mark chapter 2. That God's grace is the fuel that drives global mission. So we continue the good news mission of Jesus, as we discover from Mark chapter 2, because we have found in Jesus what the world is looking for, what a lost world needs.

We find wonderful, gracious invitations from Jesus here in Mark chapter 2, which serve for us as Christians to be our motivation for sharing good news. And if you're here and you're not a Christian, they serve as a personal invitation from Jesus to faith. Here's the first one. It's the invitation to forgiveness. So in chapter 1 of Mark, we're already introduced to Jesus as good news as the Son of God.

We have already seen him showing power and compassion in his healing ministry. We are reminded that Jesus cares for body and soul. And then in chapter 2, we come to the town of Capernaum. Busy house, busy teaching ministry, that very dramatic entry as the paralyzed man is lowered into the house.

[2 : 1 1] The need is clear, but so too is Jesus' first priority. Verse 5, when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, son, your sins are forgiven. And what we have in this moment, and the Pharisees, in a sense, help us to recognize this. It's the authority of God. Why does this fellow talk like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone? He talks like that because he is God. So it's the authority of God and the grace of God resulting in forgiveness that flows from Jesus, the Son of God.

As much as this man was physically paralyzed, like all of us, left to himself also spiritually paralyzed, unable to deal with his deepest problem, the problem of sin. And Jesus comes and addresses the deepest need, the deepest need that all of us have, is that left to ourselves, we stand under God's judgment, we are far from God. And so Jesus brings that deep healing, and he shows he has the authority to do that as he performs the miracle of physical healing afterwards.

We've mentioned it a few times. The Times newspaper in the early 20th century, after the outbreak of the First World War, had an editorial asking the question, what's wrong with the world? And G.K.

Chesterton responded this way, the Christian author. He said, the answer to the question, what is wrong, is or should be, I am wrong. Until a man can give that answer, his idealism is only a hobby. Chesterton understood the heart of the problem in the world is the problem within the human heart. And what we find in Mark chapter 2 is the grace of God coming as the answer to our guilt. People today, even if we have done away with the idea of God, even if we have forgotten any reality of sin, still wrestle with the reality of guilt. Forgiveness is a great need and a great gift that Jesus came to give. We can think of that in the storyline of the Bible right at the beginning. There were Adam and Eve living in a perfect relationship with God and with one another, but then as they rejected God and his word, as they rebelled against him, they find themselves feeling a sense of shame and a sense of fear. And their response to that was to try and hide with fig leaves and to try and hide from God. But they could not deal with their shame and their guilt. But God's grace in the garden was to offer a sacrifice to clothe them, to cover their shame. And Jesus came for that very same reason. The Son of God went to the cross bearing our sin, our shame, and our guilt, facing the punishment that we deserve to graciously invite us to forgive them. And here is why then mission matters.

Local mission, local mission, global mission matters because of the realities, the dark realities of sin and guilt and judgment, and the wonderful realities of the gospel, and the forgiveness that gives us a way back to the God of love. So we go on mission to invite people to forgiveness that's found in Jesus.

[5 : 46] We heard this morning from the Reannals. Maybe if you think back to their video, if you were here, as they minister in Colombia and around Latin America, we were hearing that it's God's grace that makes forgiveness possible in difficult family situations where churches are struggling. And it's true for us as well. That the invitation to forgiveness from God is an invitation to hope and to joy, just as David sang about in Psalm 32. So Mark chapter 2 reminds us of the invitation to forgiveness as part of our motive for sharing the gospel with others. But there is also an invitation to friendship, which is also quite remarkable here in verses 13 to 17. Every society has a pecking order.

First century, 21st century, there are those at the top of the ladder, those at the bottom of the ladder. And in Mark chapter 2, we are introduced to both ends of the spectrum. There are those at the bottom, the tax collectors and the sinners, and there are the religious leaders, the Pharisees.

The ones at the bottom were there because of lifestyle choices, there because of rule breaking. They were on the wrong side of the lines, and they were considered in a religious society to be unclean, to be unwanted, to be unwelcome. The message that they would hear, if they would even get close enough to hear from the religious leaders, was, you get to God by being like us. You're not like us, therefore you have no hope. Jesus deliberately explodes this system, this false system, by his grace. So picture what's going on in verse 13. Jesus is surrounded, as he often is, by a huge crowd, and he's teaching. But then as he walks, all his attention focuses on one man, focuses on Levi, the tax collector. And instead of addressing the whole crowd, now Jesus is addressing this one man with this call to follow me. And all of a sudden now we understand, how is it that a person can know God? It's not by our efforts, it's through the gracious invitation that comes from Jesus himself.

And in this moment, the ultimate outsider becomes an insider. This call to follow is a call to friendship, is a call into the family of God. And we see how radical this invitation to friendship is in verses 15 to 17. Here's the next scene. Levi's all excited that Jesus has welcomed him in. So what he does is he invites all his friends. And so here we find Jesus, the Son of God, sharing a meal with the so-called bad guys of society, the untouchables. And Jesus is glad to be with them, and they're glad to be with him. The people that never got invitations, now they're invited to experience God's grace through friendship from Jesus. And when the accusation comes, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus says, this is my purpose. He's like a spiritual doctor. And a spiritual doctor knows he needs to come to those who are spiritually sick and who recognize their need. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. And so when Jesus offers friendship, he's offering the remedy, the antidote to the shame, to the separation that people like Levi had known all their life, both within society, but more importantly, an end to the separation from God. How will Jesus do that? We're at the beginning of Mark's story, at the end of Mark's story, Mark chapter 15, Mark records the death of Jesus. And there in verse 38, as Jesus dies, down in the temple, the curtain, the dividing line between the people and

God's most holy place is torn in two. And so we discover that through the sacrifice of Jesus, people who trust in him can now be invited all the way in, into the presence of God, into friendship and fellowship with Jesus as Savior, the one who laid down his life to make enemies into friends. This invitation is good news. It's good news in our loneliness epidemic. We have the opportunity as a church to be a community of grace, a community of hospitality, welcoming people in Jesus' name.

[10 : 56] But this invitation is and always will be good news for those who are reckoned to be on the outside. I was reading this week about the church in India and the people that are responding fastest to the gospel are the Dalit people, the lowest of the low in society. But they hear that invitation to grace into friendship and they come in droves because Jesus, our Savior, sees and he loves and he welcomes.

And that gracious invitation then stands as good news for all of us, regardless of our past sins or our present sins, regardless of how we are viewed in society or how we view ourselves. Jesus invites us by faith into friendship with him and with our God. It's a great motivation for global mission. Here's the third one. It's the invitation to freedom. Verses 18 to 28 is a reminder. There's lots of things that we could say, but one thing we are reminded of is that within the world there will always be these two alternative paths to salvation. The one that goes nowhere is salvation by works. Here in chapter two, it looks like, for example, an insistence on fasting. Or it looks like, let me set up a whole load of extra rules around how to keep the Sabbath. That's not how it always looks. It can also look like trying to be extremely moral, carefully constructing our own personal identity or finding freedom and salvation and saying goodbye to all the rules. But the reality that faces everybody at some point is that our own efforts cannot make us good enough for a holy God. And our own efforts to construct our own salvation by works cannot give us hope beyond death. With the result that people trying to live this way will typically have a lack of joy, anxiety, perhaps being judgmental, really struggling.

Jesus comes to offer something far, far better because Jesus comes to offer freedom. Because his way of salvation is not salvation by our works, it's salvation by his works. So it's salvation by grace alone as we trust in what he has done, what he will accomplish through his perfect life, through his perfect sacrificial death, and then his victorious resurrection. So that to know Jesus, it is to know freedom from that fear.

Have I kept the rules? Have I done well enough? To know Jesus is to know the freedom and security of being accepted by God. To know life the way it's meant to be because of what Jesus has come to do.

And so it's an invitation to freedom. It's also an invitation to joy. And as Jesus speaks to these folks locked into the idea that we save ourselves by our works, he gives pictures to speak of joy. The first is in verse 19, Jesus answered, how can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?

[14 : 20] Jesus is the bridegroom. His coming is the joy of a wedding. There's language of feasting. The purpose of Jesus is to come and win a bride for himself, purchasing the church, the bride of Christ, with his own blood through loving sacrifice. Verse 22, Jesus is this new wine that needs new wineskins. Jesus isn't something just a little bit different. He's something radically new. Here is the fulfillment of all God's gracious promises. Here's freedom from trying to get to God by works. Here's the joy of being able to rest in the work of the Son of God for us. And that's the last picture there in verses 27 to 28.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Again, a claim to the authority of God, but also a promise, an invitation from Jesus to true and lasting rest. Physical and spiritual, resting and enjoying our God. The promise of eternal rest and freedom to come. Why does mission matter? Mission matters because God wants to give us the freedom to experience life to experience life to the full, to experience true joy that comes from knowing him.

If we think back, for those of us who are here to when Adam was sharing, how do we explain the ministry of Adam? Well, he's wanting people to have freedom. Freedom from religion that doesn't get people to get people to God, even when they're desperately looking for God, revealing Jesus as Lord, as the Son of God, as the only Savior. Mission matters because of the wonderful invitations that Jesus offers to us. And so our mission is about extending that invitation of Jesus to others as we love and as we share. An invitation to know forgiveness, to experience friendship, to find true freedom. So it's God's grace to us in Jesus that serves as the fuel of global mission. Let's pray briefly to thank him for his mission. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the account of Mark and the other gospel writers as to who you are as the Son of God and what you came to do in being the means of salvation for sinful people like us. Thank you for those invitations, that invitation to experience forgiveness.

Lord, we recognize the reality of our sin and our guilt. So may each one of us know that freedom that David could sing of, of confessing and finding full and free forgiveness. Lord, we thank you for the gift of friendship and fellowship, that you haven't stayed a distance, but you've drawn so near as to become one of us, to live and die and rise for us, to extend grace to us regardless of who we are and what we are like. Lord, we thank you that we have good news to share. And Lord, we thank you that you offer us a true freedom, a freedom from trying to prove ourselves, a freedom from trying to earn our salvation, a freedom to enjoy full life with you through faith. Help us to know the joy of, of life with you every day, to remember how good the gospel is, so that we would feel motivated and mobilized to bring good news to others. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's now close our time singing the hymn, Grace, and we can once again stand to sing. Let's sing.

[19 : 12] our home from death to life forever. And sing the song of righteousness by bliss and love, by merit.

Your grace that reaches far and wide
To every tribe and nation
Has called my heart to
enter in The joy of your salvation
By grace I am redeemed
By grace I am restored
And now I freely walk into
The arms of Christ my Lord
Your grace that I cannot explain

Not by my earthly wisdom
The prince of life without a stain
Was traded for this sinner
By grace I am redeemed