

The Mission of Jesus

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[0 : 00] It's Mark's Gospel. As we continue in our studies, Mark's Gospel, chapter 1, from verse 40 through to verse... Sorry, let me start that again. Mark, chapter 1, verse 40, to chapter 2, verse 17, and it's on page 1002.

So I'm reading from Mark 1, 40 to 7.

A man with leprosy. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, If you are willing, you can make me clean. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

I am willing, he said. Be clean. Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning. See that you don't tell this to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.

Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in lonely places.

[1 : 17] Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.

So many gathered there, many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.

Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus. And after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven. Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts.

[2 : 19] And he said to them, Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven? Or to say, Get up, take your mat and walk?

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone. And they praised God, saying, We have never seen anything like this. Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake.

A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth.

Follow me, Jesus told him. And Levi got up and followed him. 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.

[3 : 21] When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, Why did Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?

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. Thank you guys very much for reading.

Please keep your Bibles open there. And if you happen to get up very early to watch Ireland, you might want a pen in hand and a piece of paper.

It will keep you concentrating and awake, if you're missing some vital sleep. Well, I don't know how you could sleep listening to these stories we've just read.

They are amazing. Let's ask God for his help as we seek to look at them together. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you again for your word.

[4 : 36] We thank you for this Gospel of Mark recorded for us, told by Peter, written down by Mark, that we can read today in our language, study it together.

And our purpose for doing this, Father, is so that we would know Jesus better, that we would become more like him, that we would be changed and transformed as we encounter him in these very stories itself.

May your Holy Spirit be upon us all, giving us strength physically, helping us to concentrate, and giving us spirits to take in what you are saying to us.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in the text that we've just had read to us, Mark is introducing us to three people, all who have been completely changed.

By a simple encounter with Jesus Christ, their lives have been radically transformed. Each one seems to be in a hopeless and helpless situation, but each one comes determined and dependent, and on meeting Jesus, they are renewed and restored.

[6 : 03] Now, that shouldn't surprise us, because that is the very mission of Jesus. His mission was to come into this world to change and transform lives.

Now, that's really important for us, because I don't think there's anybody here who would say, there's nothing in my life that I don't want to change. We all want things to change in our lives.

Perhaps we want to change our circumstances, maybe a new job. Maybe we'll want to live somewhere different. Maybe we're wanting to change our character. Maybe we feel a little bit kind of introverted, and we want to be more confident, and being able to speak to people, and that people would accept us.

Maybe we want to change our physical looks, drop a waist size, build up a bicep or something, so that people will say, they're nice. Maybe we want to change our status.

We want a new partner. There's something that we would all like to change. But the problem with all of those examples that I've given is, they're all external.

[7 : 15] It all has to do with how we see ourselves, and how other people perceive us. And the people that Jesus meets here, they all seem to be concerned with external things.

But as Jesus shows us, real change starts with the internal things. In fact, Jesus deals with our perceived need, the external, to demonstrate his desire, to deal with our real need, the internal. I'll read that again. That's key to our understanding of this section. Jesus deals with our perceived need, the external, to demonstrate his desire, to deal with our real need, the internal.

Look at verse 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.

He's interested with heart issues. So let's meet those who encounter Jesus, and let's see how we too can be people who can change.

[8 : 28] The first person that we meet is, look at verse 40, a man with leprosy. Now if you had leprosy, it destroyed your life.

It affected you physically, with sores and infections, resulting in the loss of limbs, and eyesight, and eventual death. Second, it would have affected you socially.

Nobody associated with you for fear of catching the disease. You were left on your own. And third, it would affect you religiously. Anybody with a skin disease like this was not allowed anywhere near the temple where people went to worship God.

You were barred. And the way of describing all of this was in one word, unclean. In Leviticus chapter 13, this is just a reference for you, Leviticus 13 verse 45, this is what the law said about those who had leprosy.

The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face, and cry out, unclean, unclean.

[9 : 40] As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone. He must live outside the camp. So this man with leprosy, we're not even given his name, perhaps to say just how much an outsider he was, is somebody who is in desperate need of change.

So it's not surprising, look at verse 40, that he comes to Jesus, falls down on his knees, and begs Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

You see, to heal his leprosy would make him clean. It would end his physical, social, and religious problems all at once. And look at Jesus' response.

Verse 41, filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said. Be clean. Immediately, the leprosy left him, and he was cured.

Incredible. But let's not miss the point here. Jesus deals with the perceived need, the external, to demonstrate his desire to deal with our real need, the internal.

[11:05] Let's see how he encounters this man. First, look at what he does. Verse 41, look at how Jesus responded. Jesus reached out his hand and he touched the man.

Rather than run away, remember, he was somebody if there were crowds around, would be shouting, unclean, unclean, and everybody would scarp. But not Jesus. He doesn't run away. He actually reaches out towards the man who does keep his distance by bending down on his knees. But Jesus crosses that barrier and he touches the man.

Now touching him made Jesus one with him. With one touch, what the man was, Jesus became. You see, this touching was an act of identifying with the man. The man is unclean. And so Jesus now, in the act of touching, he himself becomes unclean.

[12:18] But he does it deliberately. It's Jesus is saying to him, I am willing to be treated as you are treated. I am willing to be shut out, to be pushed out, to be left outside, so that you can be made clean, so that you can be welcomed, brought in, and accepted.

In a way, through this touching and identifying, Jesus is trading places with this man.

Look at what happens in verse 45. Jesus had told him to go off to the temple. He ignores that.

Verse 45, he said, instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news, mixing with all the people.

As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in the lonely places. Do we see what's happening? Jesus, who was clean, and on the inside, walking freely with the people, has been made unclean and pushed outside.

[13:35] The unclean leper, who was on the outside, has now been made clean, and he's walking freely amongst the people, accepted. What's Jesus doing here?

Well, yes, he does heal this man. Externally, all those things are dealt with, but I think Jesus is teaching us something through this. This encounter is a picture of what Jesus sees as our real need.

for Jesus knew that he came to go to the cross. And we can picture Christ on the cross now with his arms nailed, spread out.

And with arms spread out, he is seeking to reach out, to cross the barriers, coming from heaven to earth, to cross over, to touch the world.

And through the cross, what is he doing but identifying with us? Jesus comes to take our uncleanness, not just the external, but something greater and bigger, the uncleanness of our sin, our rebellion.

[14:51] And he is shut out from God for us. He is pushed outside to the extremes, to hell itself for us.

so that you and I could be forgiven, so that we could be made clean, so that we could be welcomed in. He is trading places with us.

He is changing us on the inside so that we can be accepted by the Father. And Jesus transforms us as he did this man.

He transforms us so that we can have a new life externally. look at how this man's life is changed, verse 45. He went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

And that's the work that he does. He changes us in the inside and he gives us a new picture, a new vision of what life is all about. A life where we can talk freely.

[15:55] A life where we can begin to share and live out the message of Jesus Christ. That's what this new life is all about. This man was radically changed and radically transformed.

The second person that we meet is a man who can't walk. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. A few days later when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.

So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.

Now obviously these guys had heard about Jesus, the healer. The last time he was in Capernaum, back in chapter 1, verse 32, Jesus had healed all the people who were there, all those who had come to him.

Now this poor man, obviously he's been left out, he missed out on the big healing thing, and so he's determined to get to Jesus. Verse 4. So since they couldn't get him to Jesus because of the crowds, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on.

[17:17] Now imagine the scene, put yourself there. This crowded house, they can't get in from either way, either from the back door, the front door, or wherever. So they go out round the side, up the steps, and onto the flat roof.

And flat roofs were just made of dirt and all sorts of things. And then with implements, I don't know, bit of stick in their hands, they start digging and digging, and they break through. And the crowds below, and they look up and there's dust and dirt falling in their eyes, and then this man is literally lowered down, forcing the crowd back as he plunks himself right in front of Jesus, determined to get healing.

Now what Jesus does is rather surprising. Jesus deals with his perceived need, the external, to prove his authority to deal with our real need, the internal.

Excuse me. Jesus deals with the perceived need, the external, to prove his authority to deal with our real need, the internal.

Have a look here again at how he interacts. Now I know we know the story, but what would we expect Jesus to do next, when somebody falls down in front of them who can't walk?

[18:50] Well from our reading so far in Mark, we expect that he's going to tell the man, get up and walk. That's what we would expect him to do, but look what he says, verse 5.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now this man and his friends, they've all gotten together, they've shown great faith. They're going to go to any lengths to get to Jesus, even if that means knocking down the roof.

They're determined, they're dependent on getting to him. And that's what Jesus sees. That's primarily what he's seeing.

He sees genuine faith. faith. Because faith isn't just knowing about Jesus, knowing that he can do all of these things, but an act of trust that he alone can meet our deepest need.

[19:51] And Jesus sees this kind of faith in this man. And he sees this kind of faith that is required to bring about an internal healing.

And because he sees that faith, he responds differently and he says, your sins are forgiven. Now I'm quite sure the man would have been blown away by what Jesus said.

Quite shocked. What's going on here? What do you mean my sins are forgiven? The paralytic never came to Jesus because he believed he needed his sins forgiven. He came because he wanted his paralysis healed.

And it shows us that while we're concerned with external things, Jesus is primarily concerned with the internal. After all, this has been his message, chapter 1, verse 15.

The time has come, he said. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news, the good news that we can confess we can be forgiven and welcomed into his kingdom.

[20:53] freedom. And so Jesus, seeing this real faith, genuine faith, is willing to forgive the man his sins.

Now, what Jesus has just done and said has upset the religious leaders. Verse 6. Some of the teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Well, of course, they were right, weren't they? The forgiveness of sins is the exclusive right of God.

No one else has that right to forgive sins. And here's this man claiming to forgive sins. Verse 8. Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this is what they were thinking in their hearts.

And he said to them, why are you thinking these things? You see, he not only sees the need of the paralytic, but he sees the true condition of everybody else's heart.

[22:05] He sees your heart. He sees my heart right now. He knows what we're thinking, what's going on. And knowing what they're thinking, Jesus sets out to prove that he can forgive.

Verse 9. So he says, which is easier to say to the paralytic? Your sins are forgiven or get up and take your mat and walk?

Well, again, the answer is simple. It's much easier to say your sins are forgiven because it can't be proven wrong. I could say to any of you, I can say to curse, curse, your sins are forgiven.

You've a lot of them. Your sins are forgiven. You don't know. You don't know if they're forgiven. You can't prove it. On the other hand, it's much more difficult to say, get up and take your mat and walk. Because if I say that, or take my daughter, for example, she can't hear. Say, you're healed. You can hear. you'd have to prove it, wouldn't you?

[23 : 12] So, Jesus proves he can forgive sins by providing evidence. Verse 10, so he says, but that you may know that the Son of Man, and that's a title of great authority, that the Son of Man has authority on earth with you to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

And he got up and he took his mat and he walked out in full view of them all. Amazing. And again, Jesus is teaching us through this, of what he sees as our real need.

He isn't just somebody who comes to heal the external as great and as wonderful as it is, but he comes to heal the internal. We were looking at this very passage with some of the crusader groups on Friday night and I said to them, if you're lame, if you can't walk, does that get you into heaven? Does that get you to be part of the kingdom? No, it doesn't. If you're made well, does that get you into the kingdom? No. But if you're forgiven, does that get you into the kingdom?

It does. You can have your sins forgiven and be lame and be in the kingdom. You see, he sees, he shows us that he has the ability to forgive sins.

[24 : 43] He proves he has the authority to forgive sins because this is most important. And in offering forgiveness, he is looking for the active faith, the faith that he could see that people were determined and dependent, trusting that Jesus alone can meet our deepest need.

the third person that we meet is a corrupt, greedy taxman.

Look at verse 13. Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him and he began to teach them.

As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Now, tax collectors are thought of in the same way I would imagine as developers and bankers are in our country.

They're not the most popular, despised, hated. They're to blame for everything. And Levi's job was to collect tax from his own people and from any of the traders who were coming into the town.

[25 : 56] He would collect all of this tax and then it would be handed over to the Romans, the occupying enemy. He was working for the other side. And the way Levi was paid was by charging a bit extra and putting it into his pocket.

Not a nice character. A historian by the name of Philo writing in 40 AD, this is what he said about tax collectors. When they came, they were poor men.

But they amassed much wealth in various forms by defrauding and embezzling the people. They weren't nice characters.

They were banned from the synagogue. They weren't allowed in with the others. They were a cause of disgrace to the family. Nobody wanted a tax collector as their friend.

That's the kind of person we're dealing with here. And once again, we see how Jesus deals with this man. It's so surprising.

[27 : 00] It's scandalous. It's shocking. But before we see how Jesus interacts with them, we want to introduce some other people and their key to this story. They've been mingling in the crowd back in verse 6.

The teachers of the law. The Pharisees. We see them in verse 16. The teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors.

So they're following. They're amongst the crowd. They're observing what's going on. And because of their very careful study of God's law, because of the way they dressed, the way they conducted themselves in society, they disapproved of all those other people.

They thought of themselves as deserving and righteous, after all, they read their Bibles and they encouraged people to read their Bibles and they told people where they weren't living up to the Bible.

They were loved by God and accepted by God. And it was people like that that deserved the attention. Externally, they've got it all so right and together.

[28 : 11] together. Now those are the people that we've got. And Jesus wants to teach us something through this. Jesus responds with grace to those who see their real needs, the internal, while he refuses grace to those who rely on their good efforts, the external.

Did you get that? He responds with grace to those who see their real need, the internal, while he refuses grace to those who rely on their good efforts, the external.

Again, let's look at how he interacts. Verse 14. As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, Jesus told him.

And Levi got up and followed him. It's shocking. We've got to get our minds around it. He is undeserving. He is unrighteous.

He is a greedy and defrauding tax man. And what does Jesus do? He says, come on Levi, follow me. An outsider who worked for the enemy, hated by society, is called to follow God's king.

[29 : 27] There's nothing in his life that deserves such a call. But that's what grace is. Grace is scandalous. grace takes the initiative.

It doesn't wait for people to come to him. He took the initiative. Christ did by coming into this world, by approaching people and going to people. He makes the moves and he calls a rebellious person like Levi and says, come and follow me.

what happens next is even more scandalous. Verse 15. Jesus is having dinner at Levi's house and many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

the sinners were the people who not only disobeyed the law, well they just lived completely outside the law. They had nothing to do with it.

They wanted nothing to do with it. They were murderers, violent people, thieves, prostitutes, drug dealers, abusers. They were all there gathered together, wheeling and dealing with each other.

[30 : 39] They hung out with each other. And where's Jesus? Jesus, do you see where he is? Sat right down in the middle of them, eating dinner with them.

Not because he was forced to, but because he wants to. Willingly, he's sitting down amongst them. Now, eating with such people was a sign of solidarity.

It wasn't a case of endorsing their behaviour and saying, ah, it's alright what you do, it doesn't matter. But it was a sign of his solidarity with alienated and needy people.

You see, Jesus' act of calling Levi, the very act of going into his house and sitting down and having food with all of his friends, is sending a signal to all the rest of the people, to all the other sinners, people like you and me, that they too, you too, are called to follow Christ.

I've come for you. Well, of course, such an act didn't go unnoticed, did it, by these ever-watching Pharisees sitting on the outside.

[31 : 55] I bet they were hungry, but they couldn't bring themselves to eat with such people. Verse 16, when the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the sinners and the tax collectors, they asked his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

don't we think that the external is what really counts? Good behaviour, separation from bad people, standing back from all those terrible lifestyles, sitting and reading your own Bible, meditating on the Lord, singing worship songs, isn't that what it's about?

But for Jesus, what counts is the internal. Look at verse 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. The sick are welcome, the sinners, the disobedient, the rebellious.

They are the ones who are welcome to join in and to follow Jesus. They're the ones who are accepted. He's saying and sending out a clear message, that I have not come for those who think they are deserving and righteous, but I've come for those who are undeserving and unrighteous.

[33 : 27] Just as a doctor would never turn away a sick person, so Jesus is never going to turn away a sinner, no matter how rebellious, no matter what they do, how often they do it, it doesn't matter.

Because Jesus responds with grace to those who see their internal need while he refuses grace to those who rely on their external efforts and think that they are above everybody else and so different.

There is no grace there. One writer put it like this, ironically, he says, in one sense, great sinners stand closer to God than those who think themselves righteous, for sinners are more aware of their need of God's transforming grace.

If you're aware of your internal need, you are closer to God than if you think, I am better and superior. three people who encounter Jesus and their lives are changed, transformed radically, and

it shows us not only how we can change, but it shows us how we can bring change to the world. Because the world is fixated on the external, all the outside things, how I see myself, how others perceive me, that's what's important. Jesus says, no, it's what I see, that's what's important.

[35 : 07] I don't have time to go through all of it, but let me just say this, as we go into this week, let's be Christ where we go. Let's be reaching out, reach across the barriers, touching.

accepting, eating, welcoming, and let's point people as we point ourselves and one another continually to our amazing Saviour, who with compassion identifies with us.

With authority, he will forgive all our sins, and with grace, calls us to follow him and be part of what he is doing. This is the Christ that came into the world, and this is the Christ we are to bring into the world, and we've got to live it.

Let's pray together. we are just amazed at Christ who comes to us in grace, in compassion, reaching across, reaching into our lives, wherever we are, whatever we've done, to change us and transform us.

Father, help us to know afresh the wonder of your forgiveness, but help us to go now like Christ into the world.

[36 : 49] Help us to do what Jesus did, to reach across those barriers, to touch, to identify, to sit and eat, to be amongst the world, to be with people, to point them towards Christ, that we are all in need of grace, we are all in need of forgiveness, and it's only Christ who can change us on the inside, and give us a brighter future.

So please help us, we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.