

No Perfect People Allowed

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[0:00] Please turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 2 verses 13 through 17. Again, that's Mark chapter 2 verses 13 through 17.

Good morning. My name is Kirk Miller. I believe I was here, I can't remember exactly when it was, maybe around a year ago or so. So some of you look familiar to me and maybe I look familiar to you.

But as Zach said, I'm one of the pastors on staff at Crossway Milwaukee, Crossway Community Church. So our church and your church have something in common. We were both started or planted, sent out by Crossway Community Church in Bristol, Wisconsin.

That's where our church gets its name from. So we are, in that way, sister churches, I guess. And I'm friends with Mike. Mike, Silvati, and I, we help out with the, Simeon Trust workshops at Bristol. And I've been getting to know Zach a little bit more. So it's great to be able to be here this morning and to help you guys out as Mike is on sabbatical. And so we pray that Mike and his family enjoy that time and it's refreshing to him.

[1:16] He's able to come back and serve well as a result. Let's begin this morning by reading our passage. Again, Mark chapter 2, verses 13 through 17.

I'm not sure if it's your tradition to stand when you read scripture, but maybe to play it safe. That's what we do. I'll have you guys do it. Better to have you stand than not stand, I suppose. Mark chapter 2, verses 13 through 17.

Jesus went out again beside the sea. And all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them.

And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. He said to him, follow me. And Levi rose and followed Jesus.

And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many who followed him.

[2:23] And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Let us pray. God, we thank you for your precious word this morning, that your word reveals to us truth about ourselves, about this world, about our sinful condition, our need for your grace.

But not only so, it reveals to us that you have supplied that grace. And it reveals to us that you have done so in the person and work of Christ. We pray this morning that we would further encounter your truth, your gospel in Jesus.

Show us a vision of Jesus. Open up our ears to see him. Open up our ears to hear him and our eyes to see him. We ask that you work through the preaching of your word this morning.

[3:33] Give me clarity. Give me wisdom. May I not say anything that I ought not. May I stay close to your word. But work through this church as the word goes forth, that you would build them up to your glory.

Amen. Amen. Yes, you can be seated. Sinners faced with their sin often have one of two responses.

The first response may be despair. We think I'm too far gone. It's hopeless. We're overwhelmed by our sin and our brokenness.

Or the second response is self-righteousness. We try to ignore or explain away our sin. We pretend that it's not actually there.

Or at least it's not actually all that bad. And maybe you find yourself here today tending to one of either of those. Or maybe at times even both of those responses in one way or another.

[4:41] Despair or self-righteousness. The thing is, neither of those ends up satisfying us. Either we are honest with ourselves about how broken we actually are, but then we are left without hope.

Or we're dishonest with ourselves about how broken we are in order to maintain some sort of false hope. But as we'll see in today's passage, and even as we've been singing in many of these songs, Christ offers us an escape from this predicament.

Jesus allows us to be both completely honest with ourselves about how broken we are. And in precisely so doing, we actually find hope in Jesus.

Our passage today as we read it, and as you hopefully saw, there's sort of two scenes that show up in this passage, showcasing Jesus' mission to pursue sinners. The first scene, verses 13 and 14, we see Jesus calling a sinner, namely Levi.

And in the second scene, verses 15 to 17, Jesus then has table fellowship with sinners. So he calls a sinner, and then he has table fellowship with sinners. The first scene gives us a particular example of Jesus pursuing a sinner.

[6:06] And the second scene, we see Jesus defending these actions against those who challenge him. And our passage today, we could summarize this way.

If we were to take the whole sermon and put it into a sentence, it would be this. Jesus has come, not for those who think they are well, but for those who know that they are sick with sin.

Jesus has come, not for those who think they are well, but for those who know they are sick with sin. Let's begin with the first scene here, looking specifically at the character of Levi.

Our passage today tells us of the story of when Jesus called Levi, or Matthew, as you may know him, one of Jesus' disciples.

Now, Levi was a tax collector, and tax collectors in the Roman Empire system, tax collection was full of corruption.

[7:10] A tax collector like Levi made his living by agreeing to collect money for Rome, but then he would extract above and beyond that amount in order to keep some for himself.

And so extortion was rampant in the tax collection industry. In doing this, Levi was not only extorting, but he was also then a traitor to his own people.

He saw an opportunity to make good money, but he did so at the expense of his fellow Jews. He made wealth by essentially becoming a henchman for the oppressive Roman Empire, siding with the enemy.

Needless to say, tax collectors like Levi were not well-liked by their fellow Jews. Not only were they corrupt, stealing from their own people, but they also then served as a tangible, constant reminder of Roman domination.

In fact, tax collectors were so despised that the Jewish oral law at that time said that tax collectors were not allowed to serve as judges or witnesses in court.

[8:25] They were automatically expelled from the synagogue by being a tax collector, and they were deemed as a public disgrace to their families.

In fact, even if they were to enter a house, it was said to make the house automatically, ritually unclean.

Fellow Jews were not allowed even to receive money and alms from tax collectors since that money was considered stolen. They were even allowed to lie, the oral law allowed them to lie to tax collectors in order to protect themselves against what was deemed as theft.

Tax collectors belonged to a class of people known as sinners. You'll notice that's how Jesus actually describes them in verse 16. Look at verse 16.

It says that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors. Those two go hand in hand. In other words, tax collectors belongs to this group of people known for living in sin, known as not being Torah observant.

People like thieves and murderers and prostitutes and tax collectors. Ordinary Jews would have nothing to do with tax collectors then.

[9:44] You may recall Matthew 18, this popular passage that teaches us sort of the instructions for church discipline. If someone sins against you and eventually if they don't listen, it may reach the point where they're actually expelled and removed from the church.

And Jesus says when you remove someone from the church, you are to treat them as what? A Gentile and a tax collector. Jesus can say this because everyone would have known what it meant to be treated as a tax collector.

That people kept separate from you. There was this distance. Therefore, when Jesus came, as we see in the book of Mark, he enters into his ministry proclaiming the kingdom of God, the arrival of God's reign.

No one would have expected that it would be for someone like Levi. He's too far gone, they'd say. They likely would have thought that God's kingdom was for who?

The righteous. Not someone like Levi. But one day as Jesus was traveling through Capernaum, he came by Levi's tax booth.

[10:59] And to everyone's great surprise, Jesus looks at Levi and he calls, of all people, Levi to be one of his disciples. Later, Jesus even went to his house and ate with him along with other tax collectors and publicly known sinners.

As the kingdom of God arrived, who were to be expected among its citizens? Who were expected to receive the invitation to the messianic banquet?

Certainly, it was not folks like Levi. But here they were, banqueting with that Messiah.

And as Jesus explained, this was no accident. In fact, Jesus came for people just like Levi in order to invite them into God's salvation.

As Jesus says in verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, Jesus says.

[12:16] Those who receive salvation then are not those who think they've earned it, but precisely those who recognize that they don't deserve it. It's those who recognize their need.

The second scene, we see Jesus again as he is at the house with these tax collectors and sinners, but new characters are now introduced.

And this is where we see a conflict emerge. And out of this conflict, Jesus explains himself. These additional characters are scribes who belong to the religious party known as the Pharisees.

Now, scribes would have been experts in the Torah or the oral law, these sort of additional laws that the Jewish people created at that time to sort of create an additional fence, a further barrier around God's law.

So that's the scribes. They're experts in the law. And the Pharisees were, like today we have political parties. These were kind of like religious parties. You had Sadducees and the Zealots, and you have the Essenes.

[13:21] You also have the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a very conservative group, theologically and ethically, and they were very concerned with moral purity.

You think about this as post-exile, right? Before Israel and Judah go into exile, when you read your Old Testament, you see Israel and Judah getting heavily involved in things like idolatry, right? When you think of Israel in the Old Testament, you probably think of idolatry, unfortunately, right? Now, after they returned from exile, though, the Jewish people developed various responses. They don't want to go through exile again due to their idolatry. And one of the responses was that of the Pharisees, who said, let's follow God's law to a T. Let's add all these extra rules and demands in order to create a sense of purity, and thereby, by being pure enough, we will achieve God's kingdom and avoid anything like exile again.

You might consider them sort of your conservative, Bible-believing God follower. Now, table fellowship, which is what Jesus is engaged in here, in the ancient world, eating meals together expressed intimate association with others.

[14:40] Moreover, the Jews had strict dietary laws in order to avoid eating anything that would be deemed unclean or with anyone that would be deemed unclean.

And so they would have been incredibly opposed to entering into a tax collector's house to have table fellowship with him. That would make you unclean. It would go against everything that the Pharisees were about.

And so the scribes of this Pharisee party, they were absolutely infuriated with Jesus. Who does this rabbi think he is? This guy that everyone's looking to, that he's gaining popularity with the people, and then he goes and he does something as ridiculous as this, as if to show that this is okay?

For those like the scribes, Jesus' pursuit of sinners was scandalous. You see, a works-based mindset that says that I'm accepted and worthy based on my performance, my moral purity, how well I keep my moral standards, if I live as a good person.

You see, this mindset, it sees grace as something scandalous and even offensive. Like Jonah, who's offended by God showing the Ninevites grace.

[16:05] When we have this mindset, we feel like we've done what it takes to earn recognition and God's blessing. And so we are scandalized and offended when folks who we think clearly don't deserve that blessing receive favor and God's acceptance.

But of course, when we think this way, we're failing to realize that in fact, none of us is deserving, right? That all of us are actually debtors to God's grace.

Which is what Jesus explains in verse 17. Again, Jesus, when he hears their complaint, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but the sinner.

Doctors don't exist to provide healing to those who don't need healing, right? Of course, we have our annual checkups, but that's preventative even. Doctors exist to address the need of sickness and disease.

And Jesus is saying, I didn't show up to call those who are all fine and dandy. My ministry is precisely for those who are sick. Why is it a surprise to you that I go after the sick then?

[17:25] A doctor is no good if he stays aloof from those who are sick. He has to actually meet them and encounter them. Now to be clear, this isn't saying that there are some who are in fact righteous and don't need healing.

But Jesus is, I think, indicating that there are some who think of themselves as righteous and not in need of saving. You see, Jesus has come not for those who think that they are well, but precisely for those who know that they are sick.

Sick with sin. Jesus has come not to separate himself from sinners, but to save sinners. Throughout the book of Mark, Mark presents Jesus as the authoritative king of God's arriving kingdom.

Jesus says at the very beginning of the book, verses 14 and 15, behold, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel. And then as the book goes on, we see that the kingdom is arriving through a king, which is Jesus.

Now when a king arrives, who do they invite into their entourage? Who do people with authority often spend their time with? Oftentimes, it's the most important people, the most respected.

[18:50] They don't invite people who are from the bottom of the barrel, usually. For example, if a president is elected and they are selecting people to be a part of their cabinet, it would be ridiculous if he chose people who had committed treason against the state or picking the worst of the worst, the criminals, the outlaws of society, right?

That's not what we would expect them to do. We would expect them to sort of draw on those who are seen with a lot of prestige and acceptance. But this is exactly what Jesus does.

When he comes as the king and he puts his entourage together, he chooses people like Levi, a tax collector. You see, Jesus is an unexpected king of an upside-down kingdom.

He doesn't operate by this world's standards, the way that this world does things. Jesus is the king who comes for sinners like you and me.

Jesus has come not for those who think they are well, but precisely for those who know that they are sick with sin. And this unexpected king accomplishes his unexpected mission fully by heading to

the cross.

[20:05] You remember when Jesus asks his disciples in chapter 8 at the turning point of the book, he says, who do people say that I am? And they answer all sorts of things, but he says, what about you?

Peter says that you are the Christ. Blessed are you, Peter. Flesh and blood hasn't revealed that to you, but my Father from heaven has. But then when Jesus goes on and explains what it means for him to be the Christ, you see, Peter understood that Jesus was the Christ, but his conception of what the Christ was, this king, it was off.

When Jesus goes on to explain that he must suffer and die in Jerusalem, Peter rebukes him, and Jesus returns by rebuking him, get behind me, Satan. You see, Jesus' kingship came to fruition in an unexpected way.

He's an unexpected king who actually reigns from a cross. He is the king who comes not to be served like we would typically think a king would do, but what does he say in Mark 10, 45?

He came to serve. He's a king who shows his kingship by servanthood, by love, by self-sacrifice, to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

[21:24] That our king reigns and he achieves his kingdom by actually bearing our sins on himself so that all those who trust in Christ, who turn from their sin and they look to Christ, they don't look to themselves, they don't look to anything that they can do, any way that they can earn acceptance with God, but they look solely to Christ, they lean solely on him, they are saved through what he has done.

As we think about how we respond then to this message, first let's consider how this changes, how we view ourselves. None of us is in fact righteous and well.

We are all of the sick according to this passage. We all fit that category of being sick. So my question to you is do you know yourself to be sick?

Or do you think of yourself as well? And if you can agree with that at least theoretically, yes I know I'm sick, I know I'm not well, do you nonetheless believe it on a functional level in your heart?

You see we like to pretend that we are well. In fact it's quite common today in our society to actually label things that are sickness, things that are sin, we actually label them as health.

[22:47] But Jesus is of no aid to the person who thinks that they are well. The person who denies that they have anything wrong with them is never going to go to the doctor and therefore they're never going to get the help they need.

So the first step in receiving healing is recognizing that we need Jesus. Is recognizing that we need healing, that we are sick.

But for those who know that they are sick with sin, Jesus welcomes us as that perfect physician.

And so if you are here today and you are deeply aware that you are sick with sin, know that your sin is actually not a barrier to you coming to Christ.

If anything, it actually makes you all the more eligible for Christ. Christianity is not for those who have it all together. or we should say who think they have it all together.

You see, the message of Christianity is not one of self-improvement. Jesus is not just some moral teacher who teaches us how to clean up our lives. No, Jesus describes himself in terms of a physician.

[24:01] The gospel isn't a command to make ourselves better, but it is a promise that he will heal us of our sin. And so put your trust in the physician.

Sometimes folks will complain that church is full of sin. It's full of hypocrites. Well, yes, which is why we will all fit in quite easily, right?

The church is not a museum of saints, as some have said, but it is a hospital for sinners. sinners. In the church, there are no perfect people allowed, except for Jesus, I guess, right?

The church, what though, is a family of saved sinners. And so that means it's okay not to be okay.

You don't have to put on a front when you come to church, when you get together with other church members.

You don't have to pretend to have it all together. In fact, you shouldn't. We should be open and honest with each other. The church should be a place where we can be transparent with one

another about our sin and our struggles.

[25:15] Now, if you're like me, you don't like having your sin pointed out, though. Or, you don't like people knowing about your sin. It's humbling, and we tend to be prideful.

We want to be self-righteous like the Pharisees. We want to be right. We want to be seen as good. But the gospel enables us to be honest with ourselves and to be honest with our sin.

The gospel already shows that we are sinners. That means we cannot confess to anything worse than the gospel has already said about us.

That we are utter sinners in need of God's grace. But the gospel also tells us that we have complete forgiveness. So, if we are believers, that means there's nothing, there's no sin that we confess that the gospel hasn't already declared as forgiven.

That it hasn't already declared as paid for. I can't confess and make you known, make you know about anything that the gospel hasn't already made known and already forgiven.

[26:20] we're no longer enslaved than to needing to establish our own righteousness in our own eyes, in the eyes of God or in the eyes of each other. We are freed to be honest about our sin and to seek healing and Jesus among his people, the church.

But Christ also doesn't leave us in our sin. He not only welcomes the sinner, but you'll notice our passage describes him as a physician. And so he heals us of our sickness.

He actually transforms us. I think of Ephesians 4.20 where Paul talks about like, are you to continue living in sin? That's not the way you've learned Christ.

That's not what you've learned about Christ. What he does, he makes us a new humanity in him. Or in John 8 when Jesus interacts with the woman caught in adultery, he says to her, go and sin no more.

He not only forgives, but he heals. He transforms. Secondly, let's consider now how this changes how we view others. We've looked at how it changes how we view ourselves, but how does a message like this, a passage like this, change how we view others?

[27:37] As we consider our posture to the surrounding culture, maybe our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, do we look down our nose at others in judgment, particularly those who are not believers?

Do we talk about them with disdain and ridicule? Or does our speech reflect our own need for grace, reflect our own indebtedness to grace?

We live acknowledging that we too are debtors to God's grace. One of my favorite verses in the Bible, if I had a life verse, this would probably be it, is 1 Corinthians 15.10.

Where, like Paul, we ought to have this sort of reflex, this sort of instinct, this impulse, where we say, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

We don't think of ourselves as better than others by somehow something we've done or we've merited or we've produced. But anything that I am today, any ounce of transformation, the fact that I can even see Jesus in the gospel and believe in Jesus, it's only by the grace of God that I am who I am.

[28:55] I have no reason to boast, no reason to look down at someone else in comparison to myself. So pride, disdain, self-righteousness and judgmentalism, any sense of animosity, they have no place, they have to go out the window.

We only are who we are by the grace of God. Our debt to God's grace should make us humble and gentle and sympathetic.

Our interactions with others then should be dripping with this sense of grace. If Jesus pursued sinners, then so should we as well.

As Jesus says in Matthew 10, 24, a disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. And certainly there are ways in which Jesus is going to be quite different than us, right?

That we aren't like Jesus. But Jesus nonetheless presents himself in his ministry as a model for our own lifestyle. And so if Jesus pursued those who are sick, shouldn't we?

[30:02] Do we pursue those who are sick with sin? Are there certain people that we keep our distance from? Maybe you're like me and you feel some sort of inner resistance and hesitation to this idea because

embracing those who are sick can mean sacrificing a more comfortable and convenient Christianity?

As churches, we should ask ourselves, who are the sort of people that we attract in our gatherings? Is it those who have their lives together?

Those who sort of fit the mold of a comfortable, convenient Christianity? Or does it look like sinners are welcome here? the sick?

Those who are clearly broken? Are there any subtle or unspoken expectations about the sort of people that are welcome in our churches? Of the sort of people that make up our churches?

Of who our churches are for? We should strive to be churches where the most broken, the most unwanted, the most destitute can look at our church and say, yes, that's a place precisely for me.

[31:19] For those of us here who are parents, I imagine that many of us would want our kids to feel like they could turn to us if they ever found themselves in a time of trouble.

Maybe even a trouble of their own making. Unfortunately, though, many kids don't have their experience. Maybe when you were a kid, you didn't have this experience. That your parents maybe were the last people that you would turn to if you got yourself into trouble.

because you're afraid of how your parents would react. And likewise, I'm afraid that for many, the church in America has gained a similar reputation.

That it's actually the last place that someone would turn to if they were caught in sin. Because they're afraid of how we respond to their sin. Rather, we should make it our aim to gain reputations in our community as the first place that people turn to in sin.

That we are churches precisely for broken people. No one is beyond the gospel's reach. Maybe we feel that some people are just simply too far gone.

[32:34] They're too sinful to come to Christ. Maybe it's a co-worker, a friend, or a family member. Maybe you're tempted to feel this way as a parent about a child who has walked away from the faith.

Or maybe you're here today and this is what you're thinking about yourself, that I'm too far gone.

But if Christ came precisely for those who are sick in their sin, then our sin, far from making us ineligible, actually makes us perfect candidates for this physician's healing.

It is not those who are well who need a physician. No, because Christ is in the business of healing sinners.

Such are the very people that Christ came to save. Let's pray. God, we thank you that this, in fact, is true.

That we see a Jesus who when he shows up on earth and conducts his ministry, he is pursuing after the unexpected. He's pursuing after people like Levi, Matthew, tax collectors.

[33:49] Those who are rejected by others, Jesus goes out of his way to pursue. He leaves the 99 to go after the one. And Jesus, we recognize before you, we confess before you that we ourselves are the unexpected.

We ourselves are the same as someone like Levi, the unexpected one that you have called and have said, follow me. May we see ourselves more accurately this week as those who have received your grace, as those whose sin, although, of course, we want to turn from it, is not a barrier of your love, but the very reason that in your love you came to save us.

and help us to view others as a result of this truth. That we would deeply sense our indebtedness to grace in all of our interactions with others, whether fellow believers or non-believers alike, that we would deeply sense our indebtedness to your grace and therefore reciprocate that grace as we respond to others.

And help us to pursue the loss just as you are doing it. Use us as the vehicles of your message of reconciliation. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, that you are making your appeal through us to be reconciled to you.

That you are working in this world right now to reconcile the world to yourself. You have done so in Christ and now through the church empowered by the spirit to the ends of the earth. You are spreading this message of the cross of reconciliation to you through the son.

[35:30] And we ask that you would empower us to do that. Give us opportunities to share the gospel this week and open our eyes to see them when they come about. Amen.