

Why, Why, Why

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to that chapter, Mark chapter 2. And tonight I'm going to do something just a little bit different.

I'm not going to focus on any one particular text. I'm going to focus on four. You'll find the first one, and they all are questions which rise within the body of this chapter.

So, at least at the beginning, you're going to have to have your Bibles open in front of you. So, in order to get the four questions, the first one is found in verse 7. And all four questions are asked by the scribes and the Pharisees.

And all four questions are directed against Jesus. They're critical of him. And in every case, not only are the questions asked, but the answer that Jesus gives proves that the four questions were worth their while.

And so, we thank God and his providence for, even although these questions were asked in criticism of Jesus, yet because of the answer that they brought, we're thankful for those questions.

[1 : 09] The first one you'll find in verse 7. Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

That's the first why of Mark chapter 2. Why does this man speak like that? The second you'll find in verse 16. In a totally different circumstance altogether.

And this time, once again, the scribes are asking the question, why again? This time, it's why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners? That's the second why question of chapter 2 of Mark.

The third one is found in verse 18. And again, the Pharisees said to Jesus, why do John's disciples fast and the disciples of the Pharisees, but your disciples do not fast?

Another third why. Why do John's disciples fast and the Pharisees, but you don't? And the last one is found in relation to Jesus going through the cornfields with his disciples on the Sabbath day.

[2 : 13] And again, the Pharisees say critically to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And I hope we'll have just a few moments to go through each of these different situations, these different conversations, these beginning with the question, why?

And to look at what we can learn from what Jesus, how Jesus answers those four questions. The first one is in a house where the house has been filled with people.

They're listening to Jesus and Jesus is preaching the word to them. And four men who had a friend who was paralytic, who was paralyzed. They came bringing to him, carried by the four friends.

When they couldn't get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, as we all know the story. And then when they'd made an opening, they let down the bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic.

Now, this is the first thing he said to him before he renewed his strength. He said this, my son, your sins are forgiven.

[3 : 20] Now, this was something that not only shocked the Pharisees, the teachers of the law who were included in the crowd and who were no doubt listening to Jesus, trying to figure out the kind of teaching that he was bringing to that community and trying to figure out who he was, but doing so critically and not prepared to accept that he truly was the Messiah that they were waiting for.

So, when this poor man was brought by his friends and when he was let down, when his bed was let down, or his mattress, I should say, was let down in the middle of the house through the hole in the roof that they had created, when Jesus saw him, he said this, my son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, the question that the scribes asked when they heard that was a perfectly logical question. There was nothing wrong with the question. The problem was in their attitude.

In fact, if you were to take all of the questions at face value, there's actually nothing really wrong with them. But all of the questions betray an attitude to Jesus' ministry which was entirely negative.

And it was absolutely determined to seek what it could, false and wrong things in Jesus' teaching so that they could have reason to put him to death.

[4 : 44] And of course, eventually, they did do, but they had to generate their own charges against him in order to do that. But here, the question is absolutely logical.

There's nothing wrong with that at all. As far as they were concerned, according to their knowledge of the Old Testament, when a person sins, he sins against God.

God is that person's judge. And therefore, if there is such a thing as forgiveness, only God can forgive sins. And that's what they were saying. Here, Jesus, a man, is pronouncing, upon this man who's a paralytic, he's pronouncing the forgiveness of sins.

Now, he's not just saying, I wish that your sins were forgiven. He's not just saying, well, make sure that you live a better life from now on. He's saying, every wrong thing you have ever done, every single thought that you've ever had that's been sinful, every shortcoming that you've ever had, I am now taking every single one of them, and I am sending them away.

That's what the word forgiveness literally means. You have to remember that when it comes to forgiveness. We talk very loosely about forgiveness between a person and a person. But when God tells a person that their sins are forgiven, it literally means that he is sending those sins away.

[6 : 12] Now, we always need to come back to that. And I never, ever want to lose sight of that great fact, because isn't it marvelous? Isn't it marvelous to know that in Jesus, that you and I stand before him tonight as people who are absolutely clean?

The Bible tells us that we are washed whiter than the snow. And as God looks upon us tonight, even although we've already confessed our sins to God, because of our relationship to Jesus Christ, by faith, God has pronounced us, not just not guilty, but he has declared us to be righteous in Jesus Christ.

And that means that we can look at death itself in the face tonight and say, I know for sure that if God was to take me tonight, and if I was to stand before him, whatever individual things I have done, I know that they have all been cleansed.

That's what forgiveness means. Please don't ever lose sight of that, but it also means something else. It means that if you haven't come to Jesus, it means that you can, because the gospel is an open door in which God himself asks you and commands you and invites you to come and have this forgiveness for yourself.

Now, I can't put it any more simple, any simpler than that. I'm trying to be as simple and as straightforward because, you know why? Because the Lord himself was simple and straightforward. There is nothing as straightforward as the gospel.

[7 : 47] And it's important that those of us who preach the gospel preach it in a way that doesn't obscure the greatness of God in the gospel. And here is Jesus Christ. And he is saying to this man, I am telling you, I am telling you, he's not saying, I'll pray for you.

I'll pray that God will one day forgive you. He could have said that if he had been a scribe or a Pharisee. That's as far as they could go. But he is saying, I'm telling you that your sins are forgiven.

They are sent away from this moment onwards. They are driven away. And they will never be regarded anymore. That's what forgiveness means.

Now, it's not surprising then that the Pharisees and the scribes who were listening to this, they had some questions to ask. And they said, listen, how does this work?

This man must be blaspheming. The problem is that they never took into consideration the possibility that he may not be blaspheming.

[8 : 52] They came to the wrong conclusion because they were closed to the possibility that this could actually be the Son of God himself. That was an impossibility as far as they were concerned.

And hence the question, why does this man speak like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone? That is exactly the point. And this is the way that Jesus answered the question.

Perceiving in his spirit that they questioned within themselves, he said this, tell me this, which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed, and walk?

Now that's actually a more difficult question than it looks. And if you read the books that try to explain this chapter, they'll tell you that it was easier for him to say, your sins are forgiven.

But I actually don't agree with that at all. I believe it was easier for Jesus just to simply confine himself to raising the man up and leaving it at that. If he had done that, then everyone would have marveled at his power.

[10 : 00] And they would have left it at that. There would have been no more to it. But he didn't come into the world simply to raise people to strength.

Again, people who were sick or people who were blind or people who were deaf or people who were crippled. He came into the world, he says himself, to seek and to save those who were lost.

In other words, to forgive their sins. And here he says, I could easily have just by my own power raised this man up, cured him from his paralysis, and he would have gone home rejoicing and so would you have.

But you must know something. And look at what it says here. But that you may know, verse 10, you must know, I came here with a message.

And here's the message. that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. In other words, the pronouncement, your sins are forgiven, was directly linked to the miracle.

[11 : 05] The miracle proved the pronouncement. So that when he said, Son, take up your bed and walk, and when the man with miraculous power, by Jesus' miraculous power, was able to do that, that in itself proved that Jesus' pronouncement was actually brought into effect.

In other words, not only did the man rise up from being a paralytic, but he rose up with his sins forgiven. And that's what Jesus wants us to know tonight.

That's why he says in verse 10, so that you may know, I want you to know it, that the Son of Man has power, has authority to forgive sins on earth.

Now you see, the scribes and the Pharisees, they thought in terms of forgiveness at the judgment later on after death. But Jesus says, no. If you have any hope of being forgiven, it has to take place in this world.

And that's what the gospel is all about. God says to us, now is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. Now is the time when God is offering you that forgiveness so that you may know that the Son of Man has come.

[12 : 21] And we can come straight to him tonight. You can come straight to where he is tonight. In the secret of your heart, the Bible says if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and he will pardon us from all unrighteousness.

Is there anything keeping you from him? What is it that's keeping you from him tonight? Plain and simple so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

There it is. It's right there, the open door. You come and you discover what Jesus can do for you in the forgiveness of sins.

That's question number one. And I'm glad for these scribes and Pharisees. You know, it's really tragic. The scribes and the Pharisees, they were so near and yet so far away.

They were so interested in Jesus from one point of view. And yet when it came to the bit, they refused to put their trust in him.

[13 : 27] It was a pride issue. And I believe it's a pride issue with everyone who refuses the gospel. I'm sure it can manifest itself in various different ways. Maybe you're a husband tonight and say, well, I couldn't possibly come to Christ because I would have to become a broken man in front of my wife and family.

I'm the head of my house. I couldn't possibly make a spectacle of myself like that. Are you telling me that you're going to refuse the gospel simply because of you?

That's just your pride. That's just your pride. Or maybe you've got your mates and you're worried about your place in your community or in your circle of friends and you know that if you were to become converted tonight, then your friends would all notice that there was a difference and you might lose them.

They might start laughing at you. Well, so what? So what if they do? Surely it's better to know and to come to faith in Jesus than to live the rest of your life refusing him.

And surely if you really love your friends and if you really love your wife and your family, surely you'll want for their sakes. So that you can truly be a light in your own home.

[14 : 38] I'm just putting that to you as a challenge. Just putting it to you as a challenge because I know why people refuse the gospel and it's more often than not a matter of just simply someone's pride.

And just like these scribes and Pharisees, they were all scared of each other. They were all so scared of one another that nobody dared. That's why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he was so scared of his contemporaries.

He didn't want to lose face in front of his contemporaries. Well, so be it. He came to him at night and Jesus took it from there. And maybe it is tonight that you recognize that Jesus is what you need more than anything else and you know that.

Well, you come. Whatever it costs you, you come. And you come to trust in him. That's question number one and the time is running on. Question number two is found in verse 16.

And once again it focuses on Jesus. But this time the scene is completely different. This time he went out again by the sea and all the crowd was coming to him was teaching them.

[15 : 41] As he passed by he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Now Levi was a tax collector. That means he was a Jewish man but he was subcontracted to the Romans.

And that's why the tax collectors were so despised amongst the Jews because they were their own people and yet they were traitors. In their eyes they were traitors because they worked for money and they worked for as much money as they could get and very often there was a suspicion that they put more in their pockets than they should have and so on and so forth.

Levi was sitting at the tax booth under the Roman authorities and Jesus said to Levi follow me. And at that moment in time look at how quickly a person can come to Jesus.

That was the moment I don't know how much he knew about Jesus beforehand what he had heard about Jesus beforehand but at that moment he rose up and he followed Jesus.

Again what could be simpler than that? I'm not saying it's easy being a Christian. It's not easy being a Christian. There are all kinds of challenges and obstacles and even sufferings in the way.

[16 : 48] I would be a fool to tell you that it was easy being a Christian. Who knows what Matthew all of the twelve disciples except one were persecuted for their faith and died for their faith so presumably Matthew was one of them and who knows did he have any idea what lay in front of him?

Of course he didn't. Neither do you and I have any idea what's in front of us but Jesus is saying to us follow me. I'll take care of the rest. You follow me.

His life was so changed and transformed and here's where it comes to what I was saying before about your friends. The first thing Levi wanted was that his friends should discover who Jesus was as well because he had just discovered the lordship of Jesus that Jesus was the son of God and he had taken that step of faith in following him.

Do you know what he did? He invited it doesn't tell us here in verse 15 many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus. Luke's gospel tells us the same story but it tells us that he invited them all into his house so that they could meet with Jesus and J.C. Ryle the famous bishop says that anyone who's converted doesn't want to go to heaven alone and that's absolutely correct that if you're a Christian tonight you don't want to go to heaven alone.

You want your loved ones and your family and your friends and your neighbors to know the same lord that you know and it doesn't matter what it takes you should be prepared to live the life and to look and ask for opportunities to do what is possible to bring them to the lord.

[18 : 27] It's the same as what we read here in a way these in the first part of the chapter these four men who brought their friend to Jesus who knows how much faith these four men had but they had faith because Jesus saw their faith and now here's another man and by faith he is trying to encourage his friends and his acquaintances and he's invited them into his house and here's the reaction verse 16 the scribes and the Pharisees when they saw he was eating with sinners and tax collectors said to his disciples why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners now that wasn't the only time that that complaint was waged against Jesus remember in Luke chapter 15 when he was surrounded by literally the scum of the earth that's what they thought of them the scum of the earth all the outcasts all the outcasts and the sinners and they murmured against him they complained about him why why is he going to them and then remember when Zacchaeus was converted in Luke chapter 19 that was the complaint again he's gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner in their eyes

Zacchaeus was a sinner in their eyes the prostitutes and the tax collectors were sinners and so their reasoning went as follows if this man was truly a rabbi he would have nothing to do with them because separation is what should be the number one principle in his life if he's a teacher from God then he needs to separate himself from the rest of the world and especially the people who are on the outcast the no hopers in the world and that's these are the last people who he needs to be associating with and it's the same here why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners and this is the answer Jesus heard it he said those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick I came to call the right not to call the righteous but sinners sinners and in Luke's gospel he tells us but sinners to repentance that's why I came into the world so at the beginning of the chapter he's telling us

I want you to know that the son of man came into the world to forgive sins now he's telling us that I came into the world to call sinners to repentance now here's the logic of the scribes and the Pharisees again it was logic in and of itself it was their way of interpreting the Old Testament it was a wrong way it was a way that failed to recognize the coming of Jesus and yet it was perfectly logical you see they said if we're teachers if we're men of God we have to concentrate our minds on teaching and being the kind of people that God wants us to be what they weren't in other words their motto is this religion is for good people that was their motto religion is for good people when Jesus came into the world his motto was religion is for bad people true religion faith in Jesus Christ is for bad people the message of the gospel is for bad people really bad people the scumbags of this world to use a modern expression that's what they thought of them as no point in meeting beating around the bush there's no point in being polite they weren't polite so why should I that's what they thought of them the wasters in life

I hope there are wasters here and if not why not that's what we all are aren't we at root and if you try and convince yourself that you're any better than that you're a liar because at root that's what you would be at root that's what we all are the bible tells us that our hearts are desperately wicked I know that's not very respectful is it it's not very polite but that's the truth that's what God says about us we are we have no hope and we have no God in the world if we're not if we don't have the Lord that's what Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2 there's no point in beating around the bush that's our condition before God but that's the condition of the men and the women that Jesus went to he went straight to them because he had a message for them they were aware of their sin they were also aware that the religious people of the day were keeping them at arm's length because they reckoned there was no hope for them whatsoever

Jesus said quite the reverse I have come not to call the righteous and if you want to think of yourself as righteous so be it that's the way that the Pharisees and the scribes thought about themselves we are righteous in actual fact they weren't righteous at all Jesus had some pretty awful things to say about the kind of religion that was displayed by the scribes and the Pharisees it was false religion because it didn't recognize him as the son of God but you see in all of this Jesus came to those outcasts the prostitutes the sinners the people whose society would cross to the other side of the street rather than meet Jesus went straight to them where they were and he didn't care what people said about him because that's why he came to call sinners to repentance the tax collectors and I hope that tonight if you're aware of your sinfulness and only God himself can make you aware but I believe he has

[24 : 25] I believe because I believe that the gospel works in individual people in an individual way and God has shown you in the secret of your heart how you have sinned and fallen short of what he expects you to be and how the awfulness of what you've done the kind of thing that you would never ever confess to anyone else in the world and you might be the most respectful person on the outside and yet you know that either in the past or in the secret of your heart or in the secret of some other place that you it would just you would be mortified if anyone knew what you were like in the real self of your heart and that's what Jesus has come those are the people who Jesus has come to save God knows he knows all about us we can't hide from God

Adam tried it and he failed you try it I've tried it and we can't hide from God listen to him tonight I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance come to God come to Jesus and come to him in the person of Jesus Christ now time is running on the third question again a different situation altogether in verse 18 John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and the people came and said to him why do John's disciples fast but your disciples do not fast now there was nothing wrong with fasting Jesus himself we believe fasted and Jesus instructed in Matthew chapter 6 when you fast in other words he anticipated that there would be times when his people would fast we're not very good at it are we it's kind of gone away our forefathers knew what it was to fast but it's become kind of not very it's not very common amongst Christians certainly in the west

I suppose it's all too easy for us to just enjoy the wealth and the bounty that God has given us something to think about though I don't want to get tied up with fasting because it appears that there was a big contrast between John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees and Jesus disciples who weren't fasting and the question was asked why now again you might think well that's an insignificant question but it's not because Jesus in his answer to that question once again focused the attention upon himself and declares himself to be who he was Jesus said to them can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them now what he does is he sets the scene of a wedding and a wedding was a very important occasion at the time when Jesus lived just in the same way as it's important probably even more important in Jesus day because it took days and days and days our weddings take an afternoon but in

Jesus day it took several days and it was something that much preparation and everyone looked forward to and a wedding was one of the main events in the community in which Jesus lived and Jesus first messages this there's a time and a place for fasting and you wouldn't expect anyone to fast at a wedding of course they wouldn't just in the same way as nobody would fast at a wedding you imagine a guest came into the cab buffet and if you had invited him and you said what would you like for your food and he said no no I don't want anything I'm fasting and that would be disrespectful that would just be pietistic and disrespectful there's a time and a place for everything and that's what Jesus is saying how can it's all very well again the scribes and the Pharisees that were trying to be as religious as possible and for them religion was as much concern about what you didn't do as what you did do of course there was a list of do's and don'ts and that's what it came down to trying to impress

God by what you did and some of them were trying to do it very sincerely but Jesus was saying to them you're not really thinking about what you're doing and worse still you're failing to recognize what God has done among you you are failing to see that the kingdom of God has now been inaugurated among you it has come in the person of Jesus Christ this is the last thing you need to be doing there will be times when you'll need to fast there'll be times of persecution and times of trouble when my people will need to fast later on but not now because the bridegroom has come now you see we might think well that's just an illusion it's just a picture but in actual fact the scribes and the Pharisees when Jesus says can the wedding guest fast while the bridegroom is with them to the scribes and the

[29 : 50] Pharisees that was full of significance because of what the Old Testament said about the place of the bridegroom about what God it was literally a name one of the names that God called himself in the Old Testament let me prove it to you Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 1 let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard my beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill and that word my beloved is my bridegroom the bridegroom Isaiah chapter 54 and verse 15 for your maker is your husband that's what God says about himself and his relationship to Israel your maker is your husband the Lord God of hosts is his name and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer for the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit like a wife of youth when she is cast off says your God and so on I could quote you about half a dozen texts from the

Old Testament all of which God calls himself the bridegroom of Israel so when Jesus said here how can the wedding guest fast while the bridegroom is with them what he is literally saying is I am the bridegroom I am God he's declaring himself to be none other than God himself and of course that's what's stuck in their throats that's what they hated so much about him and what they hated I believe more than anything else was that they couldn't prove otherwise that all his words and all his power and all his actions pointed to one thing that was that he really was God in the flesh and that's the greatest discovery that anyone could make tonight that Jesus is God in the flesh because you see you might say well I believe that but I'm not a

Christian I don't follow Jesus well I can't understand that in the days in which Jesus lived there wasn't the distinction between someone who believed in their head that Jesus was the son of God and yet in their heart they didn't put their faith in him there wasn't that distinction Martha if you remember we believe that you are the Christ the son of God that was Peter who said that we believe and know that you are the Christ the son of God Martha said something similar in John chapter 11 her declaration that Jesus was the Christ meant that she was a follower of Jesus there wasn't this what we have in the 21st century western world amongst those of us who've grown up with the gospel this distinction where we actually know that the gospel is the truth and yet we're not followers of Jesus that doesn't make any logical sense at all ask yourself that question does it make any logical sense for me not to be a Christian tonight the answer is no it makes no sense whatsoever if you recognize him as the

Messiah the Lord God himself in the flesh having come into the world to die on the cross as a substitute for your sin and my sin then why not belong to him by faith I can see that there's not going to be time to cover the fourth question maybe some other occasion will do that but all of these questions they point to the one person just like every place in the Bible points to the one person just like I hope that your mind is pointed tonight to the one person I hope that one person has convinced you tonight not me but him convinced you of who he is and who he was and who he continues to be and has convinced you of how much you need him and how much he can do for you and how much he can change your life may God bless his word to us let's pray

Father once again we rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ we rejoice in the gospel of Jesus Christ and we rejoice oh Lord that we have a savior who is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God by him so Lord we give thanks for that we've been studying your word and that we've been brought back to the one place where we know that there is forgiveness of sins Lord may we come each one of us may we be changed and may we know Jesus personally and walk with him and walk after him and meet him face to face Lord bless us now we pray in Jesus name amen