

Mark 2:13-17

A Physician for the Sick

Good morning, Church...

Thank you for coming out this weekend to hear God's Word...

I met a family at our family night at the roller skating event who told me they attend online...

That reminded me, I need to acknowledge that part of our Church as well.

So, hello to the families who listen in online or watch on our live feeds.

This morning, we will be in Mark's Gospel, as we continue along here in our verse-by-verse study.

We will be in Mark chapter 2, verses 13-17, in a message I have titled "A Physician for the Sick."

I read a story this week about a Dr. Jim Withers who worked in Pittsburgh.

He became known for something unusual.

While most doctors practiced in clean offices with scheduled appointments, he would leave his clinic often and walk the streets.

He went into alleys, under bridges, and into the hardest places within the city – the places most people avoided.

He would sit down with the homeless, talk with addicts, and treat people right there where they were.

He cleaned wounds that had been festering for months.

He listened to their stories because no one else would take the time; he became a trusted ear.

Sometimes, he might even share a meal with his patients.

His operation in 2008 was officially established as the Street Medicine Institute.

But not everyone admired his work.

Some criticized him:

“Why would a respectable doctor spend time there, with those people?”

“Doesn’t this man care about his reputation in society?”

“Those people will never change.”

But Dr. Withers knew if he stayed only in his office, he would never treat people out there who needed him, who thought they were okay, but were not.

He went to the ones who were truly sick – because they were not coming to him.

This is the kind of scene we will step into here in Mark’s Gospel this morning.

Jesus doesn’t stay at a distance.

He does not wait for sinners to clean themselves up and come to Him.

He walks straight into Levi's world... sits at his table... and shares a meal with people everyone else had already written off.

And when those religious men questioned Him, Jesus gave us one of the clearest statements of His mission: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Let's pray...

Remember last time we were together? We saw four friends exercise incredible faith by making a way for their paralyzed friend to get to Jesus.

Jesus met the man's greatest need first, forgave his sin, and then restored his physical body.

We learned last week that we have a great need to get people to Jesus, so He can heal them of their spiritual helplessness and bring wholeness to their lives.

I pray that, as a Church, we always keep this sense of urgency to bring people to Jesus for their salvation.

Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and the Life...

We will stay on that path, as we see Jesus call sinners to repentance and to follow Him...

This is how a person is redeemed and changed, to then be used for God's Glory...

Look with me now at verse 13 again...

Matthew the Tax Collector

(Matt 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32)

2:13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.

Remember, the crowds were getting pretty thick in Peter's home.

So Jesus goes out by the sea to spread the people out a little.

Capernaum sits right on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee... so Jesus didn't have to walk far.

When we are in ancient Capernaum, we often teach ourselves right at the water's edge as well.

Mark gives us no certain time marker here... but we do know that people were coming from all around the region to hear Jesus... this is after at least one of His teaching circuits.

Many would have stayed in the area to catch a glimpse of Jesus or to hear Him teach.

Jesus never missed an opportunity to minister to people or to share truth with them.

Mark does not center on the teachings of our Lord; however, he moves quickly into the action of the moment.

Look at verse 14...

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

Perhaps, at one point, the tax collector, Levi, had heard Jesus teach in the open air by the sea.

But the scene quickly shifts back in town at Levi's tax booth, or as we know him more prominently in the New Testament, Matthew.

There is evidence that these men were posted in a way that even taxed the fish caught in the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus saw this tax collector sitting at his booth.

When Mark records here that Jesus saw him, in our English, it seems like Jesus just glanced over and noticed him.

This is not what the word means at all... Luke, the detailed physician, gives a clearer picture of this incident.

He uses the Greek word “*Theaomai*,” which goes beyond a glance.

Jesus looked attentively at this man, maybe having seen him before in the crowd of listeners, and seeing that Levi was connecting with the teaching and doing some soul-searching.

He is staring Levi down, so to speak—brows down, and a look from the Messiah that went right into this man’s searching heart.

We are told that Levi was a tax collector, which means he had no friends outside the occupiers from Rome.

He was a traitor to his countrymen and despised hotly.

The Romans would collect their taxes through a system they called “Tax Farming.”

They would survey a district, set a fixed tax amount, and then contract out the right to collect those taxes to the highest bidder.

They would farm it out to the private sector for collection.

The person who won the bid must hand over the assessed amount at the end of the year, and whatever they collected above that amount, they may keep as profit for their own business.

Of course, the wickedness within man made this type of system a major form of extortion.

The tax collectors abused this model big time, and, with intentionally poor record-keeping and the limited ways of communicating in the ancient world, it all allowed Rome to look the other way.

Of course, the people could never prove they were being overtaxed, so it was pointless to appeal to the government.

Rome had two categories of tax: the first were the fixed taxes, which left little room for exploitation.

But the second form, which included duties and tolls, made tax collectors very wealthy.

The people paid taxes for using the well-constructed Roman roads.

Even docking in harbors had a fee.

Any import would also be taxed.

There was even a cart tax, in which each wheel was taxed.

And those fish coming out of Galilee would be an easy means of extortion.

But it is clear from that ancient tax system that Levi was a hated man... Imagine those fishermen with Jesus seeing Levi show up to join the group.

That would have been a tense introduction, and it brings interesting insight into Jesus' teaching of a New kind of Love and Forgiveness to this world.

Levi was used to people looking at him with disdain and disgust.

But Jesus looked at him differently from all the others.

He stares into the eyes of Levi, and it is as though Jesus knows every thought, fault, and detail of his life.

Jesus still does this today... He still looks into our lives... sees it all... reveals it all...

When we read the Word of God, this is what is happening...

Heb. 4:12-13 For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. **13** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

As we look into the Word of God daily, it will stare us down!

It can even reveal the intents of our hearts.

It cuts through what everyone else sees, and looks right into our being... into the soul and spirit.

It will convict and encourage, and point us to the Will of God for our lives.

The Word of God should challenge us to respond in obedience to the Lord.

It allows us to see through the deception of our age.

Levi, there at his tax booth, as the Word, the Logos, looking into Him.

The eyes of Jesus were so piercing that Levi was in that internal battle many of us have been through.

Where we know Jesus is calling us, bringing us away from selfishness and pride, and into this New Life.

Maybe Levi is remembering the sermon he heard not too long ago.

Inside, he is crying out, "How can it all apply to me, a wicked man, a traitor to those I love?"

As his soul contemplated this, perhaps longing for a new life, Jesus called out before Levi could even speak...

“Follow Me!”

This comes as a command, not a casual request.

This is different from those fishermen, who are often seen going back to their trade in the Scriptures.

If Levi left that booth, he could never go back.

This was a life commitment Jesus was asking of Levi.

And Levi responds by immediately leaving everything; perhaps he had already been asking God for a way out.

The Way was right before him now.

He was the first to sing, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.”

He could not go back, never, and when he got up that day, 100% of Levi was committed to following Jesus.

Today, many struggle with what it means to follow Jesus.

People think they are Christian simply because they are American or their family went to Church.

And it does not cost much today to say, “I am a Christian.”

We can go to Church now and again and somehow believe we are validated as Christians.

But being a Christian truly means we are followers of Christ above everything else.

It goes way beyond Church attendance.

It is a lifestyle.

Being a follower of Jesus involves knowing Him, His ministry, and His Word, and desiring to put into practice what He modeled and taught.

The Bible is clear on this...

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Also, God's Word states in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy, for I am holy."

We are to imitate our Lord, take holiness, servanthood, and love seriously.

Looking to Levi here, and his example, we are to leave all else behind and follow Him with our whole being.

Think about what you are holding onto this morning.

What is holding you back from getting up from your tax booth, all that is familiar to you, and pursuing Jesus with your whole heart?

This is something we should be looking into, honestly, and often.

There is nothing out there in this world that will satisfy or remotely come close to the riches we have in Christ Jesus.

Money is limited to what it can produce... it can only go so far...

Beauty fades no matter how much we try to deny it.

Our possessions will break down, fall apart, and be replaced with newer models.

There is nothing worth holding onto that would keep us from being totally committed to following after Jesus.

I found after fighting Jesus for so many years, and surrendering my life to Him, that everything I was holding onto was nothing in comparison to what Jesus can give to me... Peace, eternal security, unending love, Grace... and so much more...

We don't lose anything when we surrender to Him; we only gain...

Jesus will put this expectation out later in the Gospel of Mark...

Mark 8:34-37 "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow

Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

To follow Jesus means that we take to heart the instructions for living in this world from His Word and pursue His will for our lives...

Consider what Jesus said to those who brought Him excuses...

Luke 9:59-62 Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." **60** Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." **61** And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house." **62** But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

This pursuit of Jesus should rise above all the excuses we can bring.

And there will be a noticeable change in a person's life when this pursuit is taken seriously.

Our attitude toward life and others dramatically changes...

I remember early on in my walk with Jesus thinking, "Man, I love people I hated before." I wanted to see everyone come to salvation.

And when we follow our Lord, we will share in this urgency to see those around us come to Christ.

Look what takes place in Levi's life here in verse 15...

15 Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.

This is pretty remarkable. Levi clearly does not regret his association with Jesus and his decision to give up his former lifestyle.

In Luke's account, it states, **Luke 5:29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house.**

It really does look like a goodbye party Levi is throwing for himself.

He has the wealth and means to do so.

Levi is not doing this to make himself the center of attention or to get noticed...

No, he is celebrating his changed life and the One who gave him new life.

This man was so changed by his encounter with Jesus that he saw a reason to rejoice!

How could he keep this to himself?

Don't you remember the Joy of when you first surrendered your life to Jesus?

I wanted to share the good news of my salvation with everyone...

And if no one would listen, I would preach to my dog Henry, under the premise “we are to preach to every creature.”

I just had to say something...

When a person’s sins are forgiven, and all those terrible things we have done are removed from our lives, we should praise God and celebrate all that He has done.

I knew I was going to heaven, and this incredible burden came over me because I realized so many were not going there, and I wanted to take them with me.

I imagine many of you know this... the person who the Grace of God has touched does not want to go to heaven alone.

Levi has this desire... and he throws this feast with Jesus as the main attraction, the guest of honor,

wanting to get his former associates in the presence of the Messiah so they can be changed as well.

This is the natural response of those who follow Jesus...

I see this in many of you, as you bring friends and family to church... and you are reaching people for Jesus...

You understand your calling as Jesus stated it...

Matt 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. **16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Our lives are to permeate into the world around us with Light, for our God to be glorified...

Don't ever hide it or be ashamed about it, don't put it under a basket, no!

Light is made to shine and expose...

I was talking with my kids about this this week, as a matter of fact.

Sofia went on a tangent about school and some of the things they are trying to teach her.

Then she said, “Dad, it feels like a big game or something, and they are trying to deceive us.”

She told me how AI is taking over the classroom, with teachers giving PowerPoints on how not to rely on AI for schoolwork, but they are using AI to put the PowerPoint together.

Then the deception of evolution is crammed into their minds...

But it is neat for me to see her working out her faith in it all, and even turning in Biblical answers to some of the questions, rather than taking the higher grade and saying something is true that is not.

I told her, “Your main job in that school is to shine for Jesus.”

I told all the kids then, “Our main purpose in this life is to glorify God... to get as many of these earthlings as we can to see Jesus, and take them to heaven with us.”

Some of them struggle in math, others don't like PE, but I said, as useful as those things are, there is something greater happening in your life in that school.

And even the littlest guy in our brood has invited kids to Church to come here to meet with Jesus.

It is a neat thing to see...

We are to go into the whole world, and shine our light for Jesus... To stand for Him even when it costs us socially.

Levi does this here, and it will cost him...

I mean, consider the crowd there with him, other despised tax collectors, sinners, probably the scourge of Capernaum.

Briefly, I want you to consider what Levi has learned of Jesus here...

This is pretty radical...

Levi was the most unacceptable person in that small town to be one of Jesus's disciples.

Jesus sought out someone that no one else wanted to associate with...

Everyone in that town looked at Levi and wished that he would fall under the most vicious wrath of God.

And this is a trademark of Jesus's ministry, even to this day.

Unfortunately, the Church today has somewhat forgotten this...

Jesus saw people like the woman caught in adultery or Mary Magdalene, who had seven demons in her, or the despised and unfaithful Samaritan woman. In Jesus's eyes alone, they had value.

Society, especially the religious, had written these types off.

Yet Jesus saw Levi and many others and saw what they would become.

The religious would look at Levi, they would wonder about this lowlife... “Would he even last in this New Life?”

They had no idea that Levi, as Simon would eventually be known as Peter, Levi, would have a name change to Matthew and would write one of the greatest accounts of Jesus’s life.

Matthew means “gift of God.”

Jesus saw the flawed life of this tax collector and turned him into a writer and evangelist.

And Levi knew if Jesus could touch his life, that there were many others that society and the religious establishment had overlooked, and that is who he invited to the feast.

Those who need this dramatic life change...

Church, I wonder what the lost world out there looks like to you?

We have to be careful in our Christian journey; we can get caught up in a lot of good churchy things...

We go to church on Sunday, attend Bible study throughout the week, go to Wednesday Night Church, and keep ourselves only in a nice, safe Christian bubble...

I have been there, where every association in my life is Christian...

Then those outside that bubble kind of get written off.

They are so lost, so debased, and I get more of a disgust for the outsiders... I can get judgmental, and then the most dangerous place to be in association with the world is where I have no desire to reach them...

But full separation is not supposed to take place right now...

That is after this life... right now, we live among the people of this world to have an influence and to change their eternal destination.

Matthew parties are a neat way to reach them...

Your home is set apart to Jesus... and when you invite the unbeliever in your sanctum, they will be impacted greatly by the presence of the Holy Spirit...

So far in Mark's Gospel, we have seen the impact of a home that contains Jesus... It is a great ministry tool.

When your kids have their birthday parties, invite your church friends and their Christian friends, but also think about the unbelievers you encounter at their schools, from the practice field, and even in your family.

When you have a dinner planned, think about that co-worker that the Spirit keeps prompting you to share with.

Use your home for a simple mealtime, but shine brightly for Jesus, showing the Love and Grace of God.

I remember Jessica's atheist brother, really cantankerous toward us...

Carrying "On the Origin of Species," by Charles Darwin, to get under our skin...

The weekend he and his girlfriend broke up...

I never got the chance to debate him... it was just a simple weekend in our home... watching our lives, and Jesus used it all to draw him to Himself.

Church, this is something to pray about... inviting the unsaved into our homes to meet Jesus.

Levi did this, and it is important that we too don't look out and judge them, but see them instead as desperately needing Jesus.

The religious establishment will always be contentious when it comes to the lost coming around... as we will see next... but Jesus wants them in the fold as well...

Look at verse 16...

16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

Now, in Jewish culture, to eat with someone was seen as one of the most intimate forms of fellowship.

You would never, ever find a Pharisee eating with a sinner or a heathen.

They believed that when you broke bread with someone, you became one with that person.

I would break the bread, and you would have a piece of the same bread, and as we dip it and eat, the one piece going in would symbolize oneness between us.

To bring someone into that type of unity and fellowship would be the highest in this culture.

This is what Levi was doing with Jesus, as he invited his friends to share in his Savior.

That they, too, could have this oneness with Jesus.

Jesus desires this oneness and connection with everyone...

His heart in this is shown in:

Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

The establishment was appalled that this supposed Holy Man was sitting and eating with sinners.

How could He be enjoying Himself like this?

Oh, how the religious establishment hates when people have fun... after all the sacrifices they make for God... it just is not right to see others laughing and eating and enjoying life.

Can Christians have fun? Are we allowed to enjoy life?

Well, some can, that is for sure... Others piously avoid it for some spiritual measuring line over others.

Typically, when the religious see others having fun... they do stoop down to this judgmental level...

I saw a bunch of you laughing at the roller skating rink the other night, having fun, a very light evening...

It is great to see it... what a witness to the world when they see us living life and enjoying things...

They looked at Jesus here, rubbing shoulders with these folks, and eating, and they could not stand it...

Of course, there is a balance in all this; there is a huge gap in taking your family to go watch the new Star Wars movie coming out and saying, "I believe I am called to minister to people in strip clubs and bars..."

Jesus was a friend of sinners, yes, but Levi brought them into his home...

Never compromise your walk to reach them...

Jesus never stayed with them, but gave them the option to follow Him, and make a decision to change and repent.

He did not hang with the sinners without a purpose.

Especially do not forget where you came from...

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

We definitely don't want to go back to places that will cause us to stumble, but in our home, we can bring them into our standard of living.

I remember Jess inviting a co-worker, Victor from Michigan, over to our apartment after we had given our lives to Jesus... we wanted to minister to him.

And he came to our apartment with a 20-pack of Bud Light... and I was okay with it... Still a little rocky in my convictions...

But she greeted him with a smile and said, "You can leave that right there."

It stayed outside by our front door until he left... and we showed him a good evening without the spirits of alcohol... Vic ended up coming to Church with us soon after...

And I will never forget that morning... because we had brought with us a couple of co-workers, the widow who lived in our apartment complex, an immigrant from Cameroon that we met at a park... and we all had to sit right up front.

And our pastor gave an altar call, and before he could finish explaining the Gospel, Vic stood up in the front row to receive Christ...

And I thought back immediately, if Jess had not stepped in that night and made him leave the alcohol at the door, and we let him get hammered in our home as we tried to share Christ with him...

He would have thought we were no different than anyone else at work...

But she showed him something different in our home...

So, we want to befriend the sinner for the purpose of bringing them to Christ... they do not need us to act or look like them to reach them...

Here at Calvary Old Town, we want those doors to be open to anyone, let them come here and hear the truth...

I don't care what your background is or where you come from; if you are here looking for answers for your life, you are welcome...

Many of us come from the worst kind of backgrounds...

It is my prayer that our Church remains a place where the Grace of God rules and reigns, where lives can be impacted and changed by encountering Jesus.

May God protect us from looking down our noses at those who have not yet encountered Jesus...

Let's finish this out with what Jesus says in verse 17...

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

This is the hard truth... if a person looks within, and believes they are doing just fine in life...

They have good things to measure themselves against others... They do pretty well at keeping their noses clean... They don't associate with evil people.

They believe as the Pharisees did, that their standing is good before God, because "at least I don't do those things."

Well, for that kind of person, there is no Gospel or Good News.

Why do they need a Savior? They are doing just fine on their own, in their own estimation.

Why send a doctor to someone who is not sick?

Why would you offer financial help to a person who is not poor?

Would you throw a life preserver to a person who was not drowning?

Often, the hardest person to reach is the person who is self-deceived into thinking they are doing well in life.

Many times, it is those who grew up around church their entire lives who have the hardest time seeing their own need for Jesus...

They can see your need for Jesus... but usually not their own.

But the Gospel, the Good News, can only connect a person to Jesus who sees their own wickedness...

It is not your goodness that connects you with Jesus; it is your badness.

It is not your merit, it is your misery...

Listen, it is not our own standing, but it is our failing...

Not the wealth that brings us to Jesus, but our poverty and need.

The Psalmist claimed, **Psalm 107:20 He sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death.**

Jesus came to save sinners, the sick, and those who recognize their great need for Him.

The trouble with the religious is it is so difficult to see their own faults, to admit their great need, to see their shortcomings...

It is only the sick who need healing... it is sinners who need to be saved... and as followers of Jesus, we cannot lose sight of this.

May we be like Levi, who was willing to leave his tax booth, his life behind, to follow Jesus and to bring others to Him.

The scriptures state... **James 4:14 What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.**

I think of my childhood Pastor, Pastor Larry, who served the Lord till the end...

He died on the mission field in his 80s... Serving the Lord...

He should have been enjoying his retirement... relaxing on a golf course somewhere... On a beach in Hawaii... collecting shells with his wife...

But he was in Eastern Europe, serving Jesus...

Some might say, "What a wasted life..." "What a tragedy."

Was it a tragedy?

I am not sure it was...

We are brainwashed in our culture to kill ourselves in this life...

Man, what a goal to reach early retirement, it would be...

To retire somewhere by a lake or a beach, cruising all day, fishing off a nice boat, skiing, and having daiquiris every evening...

Starting a leaf collection of all the different species of trees I come across in my travels... that would actually be a fun hobby for me... I love horticulture.

But I believe that would be a greater tragedy at the Bema Seat of Christ.

Pastor Larry, having left his great career of photojournalism for the Dodgers, had a pathway to the retirement of his dreams...

But leaving it all behind, to die serving in his resting years, serving the Messiah who saved him from his sins...

He will go to a glorious reward...

But going there, with a leaf collection, and fishing stories, and a life lived for self...

The messaging today tells you, "You deserve it!"

No, not to be melodramatic here or to be mean...

But the reality is, as my wife often reminds me, "We deserve hell!"

And Jesus Christ saw us, and we responded to the salvation He extended to us...

He snatched us from an eternity separated from God, in torment... because that is what our sins deserve...

What else can we do but give Him this life back...

What a tragedy it will be for many, who bought into the lie that it was supposed to be about them...

A life committed to Christ will see the great mission field before us, and all the lost and dying out there, and they will lay it all down to reach them with the

same message that saved them from the furnace of eternal torment.

Sending out missionaries? Yes, we do every Sunday...

As you leave this sanctuary and return to your lives, look around and consider the great opportunity before you.

You leave every week, a missionary with a message...

Don't judge them... pray how you can reach them!

This is our life's purpose: to bring the sick to the Great Physician.

If you are sick this morning... You recognize your need for Jesus...

Don't leave here without responding to Him... He is the only true healing you will find in this life...

He will heal your soul... and secure your life in everlasting Glory with Him. **Let's pray...**