

Mark 1:40 - 2:17

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much Steve, it's really good to see you and do keep that page open in front! of you if you find that helpful. If you've got a mobile phone you may have had the experience! of getting a missed call from somebody. So they ring you up don't they and you don't get to the phone in time and you see their name on your phone you've missed the call and you ring them back straight away don't you? If you're like me you get really excited that somebody has called you up, somebody has phoned you up and they want to talk to you, it's really exciting and maybe it's a friend, they want to catch up and have a chat and you wonder what is it that they want to talk about? So I ring them up and straight away and they explain to me, oh no sorry, I actually wasn't calling you, my phone accidentally dialed your number while it was in my pocket. I don't know if that's ever happened to you, I wasn't calling you. And when you hear that it's a bit gutting isn't it, it's a bit disappointing. To think that somebody is interested in calling you, but you find out that it was a mistake, it's quite disappointing. It's the kind of disappointment that you could have with the call that Jesus makes to us. Just look at Mark chapter 2 verse 17, it's the end of that passage that we read there a moment ago. 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. We get the first time that these highly respected righteous guys called the scribes of the Pharisees and start moaning about Jesus. But to righteous people he says, I'm sorry, that's your mistake, but I've not come to call you, I've come to call sinners. God's kingdom he says, which I've preached to you about belongs not to righteous people, but to sinners. It's quite surprising that, isn't it? Now we've been looking at Mark's Gospel over the last few weeks, and it's been a pretty phenomenal start. Jesus' miracles have immediately and understandably caused this sort of Jesus mania, haven't they. We read about crowds gathering in amazement around Jesus, gathering for his help in healing. But rather than a healing, if you remember, a healer last week we saw, didn't we, his priority as a preacher. Do you remember chapter 1 verse 38? Jesus said to them, let's go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for. Jesus wants to bring these people a message about God's kingdom. His priority implies that there's something far more important for these people than their physical condition and their physical circumstances. There is something far more important, according to

Jesus. Our hearing about and our understanding about God's kingdom. What does it mean to be in God's kingdom? How does somebody belong to God's kingdom? How might somebody be excluded from it? Jesus thinks that those things, those eternal things, are far, far more important for these people than healing them physically, temporarily, for a time. Now Mark often likes to put stories about Jesus in sets of three, and I think that's what we've got in the passage we read a moment ago. Three stories of Jesus doing miracles that teach us something about God's kingdom. And the main point Jesus wants us to take home this afternoon is to watch the missed call. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus' call is exclusive, so the kingdom of God is exclusive. It's for sinners. And it's only for sinners. Nobody else. Exclusively the sinners. So you've got three characters in these stories. Three different miracles. You've got the leper, the paralyzed man, and then Levi, the tax collector. They're all helpfully titled in the Bibles, aren't they? Three events. But I want to show you the parallels between these three stories here. And three things, three points this afternoon. The sin, the solution, and the salvation. The sin, the solution, and the salvation. First of all, the sin. Now the thing that all three of these characters have in common is the diagnosis. Despite the various obvious problems that they each have, it turns out that the big problem they have is some kind of sin problem. So there's the leper in verse 40. Look down there. A leper came to Jesus, imploring him, kneeling before him. Now if you know anything about leprosy, you might know it as the degrading, isolating, contagious skin disease. And Jesus heals him of that, doesn't

he? It's an amazing scene. But what is interesting is what Jesus says to him after that healing. Look at number 44. Jesus said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof to them. So after the physical healing, Jesus has got something more in mind for this man, hasn't he? He's got something more important for this man in mind. Now leprosy in the Bible is highly symbolic. It was a symbol. The outward decay of the skin was an outward symbol. It was an illustration of an inner problem. So it was a reminder to all the people that our problems are actually more than skin deep. Leprosy was an infection that was caused by problems underneath the skin. And it manifested itself in the skin on the outside. So the obvious problem of the skin disease was a picture of something far less obvious inside. Inside the heart. Something that was terribly wrong on the inside of man. It was a really graphic visual sign, wasn't it? Of a hidden uncleanness in the human heart. It said to people who looked good on the outside, this is what you're really like on the inside. So to be healed from leprosy took a whole process of going to the priest at the temple, making proofs to them, going through various cleaning rituals. And only once you've been healed could you be brought back into society. I don't know if you remember there was a guy in the Old Testament called Naaman who lived in another country. He wasn't a Jew. And he had leprosy. And he asked Elisha, the prophet, for healing.

[8 : 37] You can read about it in 2 Kings chapter 5. And Elisha replies to Naaman and he says, am I a god to kill and make alive that this man sends word to me to cure a man of leprosy? See Elisha's response there shows how serious the problem was. To cure leprosy was like a resurrection.

To make alive. So serious was the problem inside. So the leper in Mark is an obvious outward illustration of an inner problem in the heart. A sin problem. Decay within. Let's jump a few verses on though to chapter 2 verse 1. There's the paralytic man. And again he's got a very obvious problem, hasn't he? It's the famous story of his friend bringing him to the roof of Jesus' home it seems like, doesn't it? And breaking down the roof and lowering him in. His friends bring him in desperation and drop him through the roof. Now the problem is obvious here.

The man is paralysed. You'd have to be pretty thick, wouldn't you, not to work out what his problem is. So look at chapter 2 verse 5. Jesus saw their faith. He said to the paralytic, my son, your paralysis is healed. No, he doesn't say that, does he? Chapter 2 verse 5. Son, your sins are forgiven. Jesus again says, despite the obvious problem, there's a worse problem here. A hidden problem. A hidden sin problem. Then tax collector Levi is in the same boat, isn't he? If you flick on to verse 14 of chapter 2. He passed by Jesus. He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. Now tax collectors in Mark's day need no introduction. Jewish writings from around the time give us really big clues as to what people thought of tax collectors. So a Jew who was a tax collector was exempt from witnessing in court. He was expelled from the synagogue.

The touch of a tax collector, a bit like a leper, could make your house unclean. And contempt for tax collectors was epitomised in the ruling that Jews had licence to lie to tax collectors freely. Tax collectors were reminded the Jews of the Gentile Roman occupation of Gentile uncleanness. And what makes this particular tax collector worse is that his name is Levi.

It's a Jewish name. So he is a Jew who has defected. He's a backslider, isn't he? His uncleanness uncleanness is his own choice. He is unlike the leper in that sense. So he was seen as morally despicable. He was ritually unclean out of choice to be a tax collector. It's his way of making money. Mark tells us that Levi is one of the sinners at the meal afterwards. And Levi says it, doesn't he? Perhaps he is overwhelmed by guilt, knowing his heritage, knowing that his occupation is seen as it is. So the sin problem is there. All three of these men are helpless in one way or another, aren't they? They're unclean. Despite the obvious problems that they have, Jesus knows the hidden problem. The decay in the heart. Now if we could all turn ourselves inside out this afternoon, that sounds a bit grim, doesn't it? But if the obvious things about us, the things on the outside became hidden, and the hidden things about us became really obvious, I wonder how we'd feel. Perhaps we'd feel a little bit more like the leper. We'd feel a little bit more like the paralysed man or Levi. A little bit more helpless than we feel now. Perhaps a lot more unclean. A lot more isolated. If the hidden things about us became obvious, I'd feel pretty wrong about that. And I think that's just a sign, isn't it, that our consciences tell us that there really is a sin problem. There is decay underneath.

[13 : 41] Despite the obvious on the outside. And it's what Jesus says is true about us, most importantly. So the sin problem. But secondly, the solution. The solution. In each of these three

stories, there's a great change, isn't there? There is a turnaround in the lives of these characters. Take the leper. Now lepers weren't allowed within a certain distance of anybody else. There was a kind of zone.

around them. You give them around them. You give them a wide berth if you saw one on the street. So this leper, he is brazen. He breaks those rules, doesn't he? Chapter 1, verse 40.

He comes to Jesus. He comes to Jesus. He breaks the rules. He implores Jesus and kneels before Jesus. He's desperate, isn't he? And he breaks the rules. So at that point, a normal Jew would have ran a mile. They would have seen this leper coming and they would have got away as far as possible from him, from the contamination.

You yourself could be made unclean. So it's really surprising that Jesus doesn't do that, does he? And instead, Mark says, moved with pity, Jesus gets closer to him. Jesus stretches out his hands and touches him.

Jesus doesn't seem to be worried about cross-contamination. Jesus doesn't seem to be worried about cross-contaminations, does he? If you did touch a leper yourself, you would then have to go through the ritual of going to the priests and being cleansed and all the rest of it.

[15:29] But Jesus doesn't do that either. So in some supernatural way here, Jesus symbolically absorbs this man's uncleanness.

He doesn't take it anywhere else to be dealt with. He deals with it himself. He somehow takes his uncleanness upon himself.

He removes not just the skin disease, but the uncleanness. He says, will you make me clean?

Jesus says, I will be clean.

He cleans the hidden things. He absorbs them to himself. It's interesting the question is, Lord, not can you make me clean, but will you make me clean?

And look at the paralysed man. His friends, too, break all the rules, don't they? Well, they literally break the roof down. And they're desperate as well. Jesus simply declares, son, your sins are forgiven.

[16:37] Now, I hope you can see how scandalous that is. Just look at chapter 2, verse 7. The scribes and the Pharisees, they start saying, why does this man speak like that?

He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Now, they've got a point there. The offended party in any situation can only be the person to forgive.

Isn't that right? So, if I offend you in some way, I can't ask somebody else to say sorry for me. And nobody else can say you're forgiven apart from you.

Only you've got the right to say that to me if I've offended you. That makes sense, doesn't it? And so, it's the same with our sinfulness. Its offence is to God.

And nobody else has authority to say we're forgiven apart from him. We've offended him. Well, actually, you could say it, couldn't you?

[17:39] But it wouldn't mean anything. You'd have no real right to speak for God in the matter. So, what Jesus does here is scandalous.

He speaks on behalf of God. He speaks as God. And Jesus proves his authority, his right to do that, by the miracle in verse 10 to 12, doesn't he?

That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He says to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all.

So, when Jesus says you're forgiven, you really are forgiven. There's no debate about that.

He has the authority to do that. He has the right to say that. When Jesus says you're forgiven, God himself says you are forgiven.

[18:40] I will be clean, he says. Son, your sins are forgiven. And he calls Levi, follow me.

The third of these three men with a sin problem. Now, Levi's is perhaps more pronounced, isn't it? Levi was more hated. He was perhaps, he perhaps had sin that was consciously held.

He was bad and he knew he was bad. But the solution to sin, Jesus comes and absorbs sin.

And later on we see, don't we, that he deals with it finally on the cross. He has the right to say to you and I, your sins are forgiven. And he calls sinners to himself.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. His call is exclusive. It's for sinners and it's only for sinners.

[19 : 46] And nobody else. Exclusively for sinners. Now we're almost done, we're at our third point. I want you to see as we close this afternoon, the difference Jesus makes for these people.

People with a sin problem. They need Jesus for a solution, but he gives them a salvation as well. So thirdly, the salvation. Now if you can imagine a sort of before and after picture.

So you see it on dentist's adverts, don't you? Before and after. What is it like? Imagine that before and after picture for these three guys here. All three of them, after they meet Jesus, do something quite similar.

I don't know if you noticed that. Look with me at these verses. So chapter 1, verse 45. Chapter 1, verse 45.

The leper went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news. Chapter 2, verse 12.

[20 : 52] The paralytic. He arose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all. Glorifying. Going home and they glorified God as a result.

Chapter 2, verse 14. And Levi. He passed by. He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. He said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him.

Now do you notice the similarities there? After Jesus, there is a sudden change in action, isn't there? There is a sudden change in the pace of their lives.

There is a sudden change of gear. There is new life. So the leper, the paralytic, Levi, they all rise up and they do something. Life suddenly becomes pointed and active.

Jesus brings salvation. The leper gets up and he goes to the temple. So after he meets Jesus, he is reinstated with society, with the temple, with God.

[21 : 58] He is brought back to God's people. With the paralysed man, he rises up and praises Jesus. He has really got something to be happy about.

And then Levi, he rises up from the tax booth. He is released from materialism, from greed. From guilt. He is brought back.

And you know, we saw, didn't we, from verse 15, how Levi then gets to have a meal with Jesus. He actually gets to eat with the Messiah.

After Jesus, Levi, the unclean sinner, is fit to eat with the king. In his kingdom.

With the Messiah. He's fit to spend time with Jesus. And Jesus wants him there. Jesus, it feels like, is the host at this party.

[23 : 00] With his friends, the other sinners, who have met Jesus. Jesus brings salvation. A new life. Back with God. Back with others.

Back from the dead. Eating with Jesus. And perhaps most of all, Jesus moves all three of these guys on from religious legalism.

The rules that the scribes have used to isolate them all are history now, aren't they? Jesus calls them to be in his kingdom now.

They've got a sin problem. They meet the solution in Jesus. And he brings each of them salvation. And it just keeps ballooning, doesn't it?

At this meal. Look at all these sinners. The scribes say. All these sinners are here. Jesus eats with. Deals with them. Gives them salvation. I will be clean.

[24 : 01] Son. Son. Your sins are forgiven. Follow me. I came not to call the righteous. But I came to call sinners.

Jesus' kingdom is exclusive. It is for sinners. And only for sinners. And nobody else. Sinners who find a solution.

And who find salvation. In Jesus. Who are changed. You know. There may be things about you. That seem really obvious. To yourself.

As you look in the mirror. In the morning. That maybe you'd want to change. Things on the outside. Perhaps. But Jesus cuts underneath us.

And he says. No. There is something far more important. If we turn ourselves. Inside out. It's the problem underneath.

[25 : 01] The uncleanness. But Mark says. Lo and behold. Here is the solution. So. Why not break all of the rules. And kneel before Jesus.

And implore him. Lord. If you're willing. Make me clean. Break the roof in. And go to Jesus. Jesus. Because it's people like that.

Like you and I. The sinners. That he calls. I will. Be clean. Your sins are forgiven.

Follow me. Let's close. In a short prayer together. Let's close.