

Jesus goes for the jugular

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well we turn to God's word now and we're in Mark's gospel again. And you'll find that on page 837.

And our series is called Meet Jesus and today it's Meet Jesus as he goes for the jugular. And I hope we'll see what's going on in our passage.

So we'll look together at Mark's gospel chapter 1 reading from verse 40. And a leper came to Jesus imploring him and kneeling said to him, If you will you can make me clean.

Moved with pity. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean.

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once. And he 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.

[1 : 1 1] But he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter.

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together so that there was no room, not even at the door.

And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him.

And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, My son, your sins are forgiven.

Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

[2 : 1 0] And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or say, Rise, take up your bed, and walk.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, I say to you, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home. And he rose.

And immediately he picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw anything like this.

He 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.

And he said to him, Follow me. And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in their house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

[3 : 1 3] 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.

Well, if you were with us last week, you might remember that we finished with the priority of Jesus' mission. And the question was about the focus of Jesus' work.

Did he come for healing miracles? Or did he come with a message? A message for his entire creation. What are your priorities, Jesus?

And we saw that, didn't we? Chapter 1, verse 38. And he said to them, Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came.

[4 : 17] Incidentally, that's the first mission statement of Mark's Gospel, the first of three. And today, the question is not this time the nature of Jesus' ministry, whether it's healing ministry or it's preaching, but it's about the type of person he's calling into his kingdom.

He's bringing in his kingdom, isn't he? You might remember that from chapter 1, verse 15. And the question today is, listen, who's in and who's out?

That's the question today. And actually, we've got five points. Our first point is a leper touched.

Jesus is concentrating on teaching, isn't he?

But perhaps this leper, well, maybe he doesn't actually know that. And besides, what seems far more important to him is that Jesus can heal him.

And this leper is absolutely certain of that. Just look with me there at verse 40. And the leper came to him, do you see, imploring him. And kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean.

[5 : 30] I'll just read to you from Max Lucado about leprosy in the first century. The condition rendered the body a mass of ulcers and decay.

Fingers would curl and gnar. Blotches of skin would discolor and stink. Certain types of leprosy would numb nerve endings, leading to a loss of fingers, toes, even a whole foot or hand.

Leprosy was death by inches. The social consequences were as severe as the physical.

Considered contagious, the leper was quarantined, banished to a leper colony.

But this leper, he's got up in the morning, hasn't he, to reverse all of that. He's got this audacious plan to break into Jesus' schedule.

You remember that interruption in verse 40. He's got initiative, hasn't he? This man, he knows, he wants healing and he knows Jesus can do it.

[6 : 30] Just think of the scene there. I imagine everyone might have died for cover when a leprosy came up to the group, you know, like someone's thrown a hand grenade in or something like that.

If Jesus had bodyguards, they'd probably stand in front of him to protect him. You know, take the disease in the line of duty. And verse 41. Jesus, do you remember, moved with pity.

He stretches out his hand. It's like he stretches it from one world into another. Do you see? And it's an interface, isn't it? That leper has never experienced such a thing before.

Nobody before had broken into his world of exclusion and isolation. And friends, God's revelation is the same.

Every word in the Bible is God reaching out to you, crossing through boundaries to reach you. So, Jesus heals him, doesn't he?

[7 : 32] He says, I will. And verse 44, Jesus sends him off to the priest so that he can be reunited with his family and with the community. Jesus here, well, he's using the Old Testament procedure, fulfilling the law rather than abandoning it.

Oh, says Jesus, and don't tell everybody about it. He's already got a lot of problems with the crowds, hasn't he? But look there at verse 45. Just see what the leper does.

But he went out and began to talk freely about it. And so, the noose spread so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter like a magnet is drawing the creation to himself, isn't he?

Our second point, a paralytic forgiven. And I guess this is the main point that I'm thinking about, Jesus going for the jugular.

So, you remember those four friends, don't you? They're like Strathclyde firemen. You know, when they turn up, it's on fire somewhere. They have to be radical, don't they? Break down doors.

[8 : 42] Do radical things like that. Take action. And that's what's happening there in verse 4. Just look there at verse 4. And when the crowd could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him.

And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. Now, at this point, the sense of anticipation, it's electrifying, isn't it? It's so dramatic, this scene here in the Bible. And all the crowds, they're already up to speed. They've seen miracle after miracle. And by now, there's sort of a routine to it. But nonetheless, it thrills their hearts every time.

And there's four pairs of eyes, isn't there? Like looking down from the roof. Can you just picture the scene? Perhaps it's all silent. Maybe it's like the world's just stopped for a few seconds.

Stopped as it anticipates words of healing falling from Jesus' lips. And now, familiar refrain that keeps reversing the effects of Genesis chapter 3.

[9 : 50] Jesus casts his eye over the scene, doesn't he? And we all hold our breath. And verse 5, he catches us all off balance.

Just look there at verse 5, what Jesus says. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, what does he say? Does he say, get up and heal him? No, my son, your sins are forgiven. It's like a bolt of lightning. Is it? That's what I think it's like. It's like a surgeon doing the wrong operation on somebody. It's just such a shit.

It's scandalous. The paralytic, he's not said a word up until this point, but I imagine he's lying there with his mouth open in shock. And it's chapter 1, verse 38, isn't it?

It's a spiritual message that is Jesus' priority. Our eternal well-being is his mission. Rather than, listen, our immediate felt needs.

[10 : 52] And what words? Aren't they amazing words? What words? My son, Jesus says. My son. Friend, sin is far more than an offence.

It's a broken relationship. And Jesus says, my son. And more of Genesis chapter 3 is reversed. Who could fail to be moved by that?

And the answer is the religious here. You know, some scribes. Verse 5 was like a red rag to these religious bulls. Just look there at their reaction.

Look at verse 6. Now, some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

And this is an indication of a rift appearing between the religious establishment and Jesus. They're thinking, well, healing is one thing, but forgiving sins, well, that's just not permitted.

[12 : 03] There's no forgiveness outside of the temple system. Jesus, you're way off script here. Or else, he's God.

Mark wants us to be thinking. Think about this. Verse 7 is actually perfectly logical. The scribes are right. Only God can forgive sins.

I can't set up a booth, can I, on Buchanan Street, outside Borders Bookshop one Saturday, with a big sign on it, forgiveness of sins. £20 for telling that lie at work.

£85 for adultery. Another £20 for that speeding offence you thought you got away with. I can't do that sort of thing. No, listen, only the person offended can forgive.

And the person is ultimately, who is that? It's God, isn't it? We offend with our sin. We sin on his territory. He owns us. Friends, you're perched on his creation.

[13 : 05] And we sort of pathetically try to edit him out. So Jesus, he has the authority of God, doesn't he? Chapters 1 and 2, he's casting out demons.

He's teaching with authority. He heals. And now here, he's forgiving sin. And to confirm it all with a stamp of God, he heals, doesn't he?

This paralytic. Look there at verse 10. But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic. I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.

And what does he do? He rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before. What a sight that must have been. So that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we've never seen anything like this.

Just imagine that. Eyes popping out like organ stops all around. He just gets up, doesn't he? And if Jesus had not told him what to do, he wouldn't know what to do next.

[14 : 10] But he looks down and he sees his bed. Looks all out of place, doesn't it? He looks redundant. Well, I better take it home, he thinks.

So he just sort of bends down, picks his bed up, rolls it up under his arm, and he walks out, straight back, chin up, and he strides out, doesn't he, with his bed under his arm, jaws drop.

He must have had a smile on his face. Those four pairs of eyes looking down through the roof.

What did they think, you know? He came in, didn't he, through that roof.

He came in a paralytic, and he walks out healed. He came in a sinner, and he walks out. What does he walk out? A son. And then that bed.

It's like a World Cup trophy. Can you think about that? He must have, well, I'm making this up. He could have gone home, couldn't he? Could have gone home to his father and said, look at this.

[15 : 06] Do you remember buying this for me? What a thing to happen. So he went out before them all. What a display. You know, if I was there, I don't know about you, but if I was there and I saw all of that, I'd have tears running down my face.

This is so good. And Isaiah says that it's a little foretaste of the new creation. Just listen to this. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. And there's a little bit of that going on here, isn't there? Four pairs of eyes, they pull back from that hole in the roof. His friends scurry down the stairs to meet him. And five men walk into the distance with a message, don't they? A message about this Jesus Christ and the encounter that they've had with them. Friends, this is spectacular. This is up front God stuff. It's not some isolated maverick in a cave somewhere, writing things down, making up his own religion.

[16:13] No, it's a message of reconciliation, authenticated, listen, by the deeds of God, in full view of everybody. Our third point, a tax collector, called chapter 2, verse 14.

And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, follow me. And he rose and followed him like the fishermen leaving the nets, isn't it? Levi leaves and follows. And the shock is, this is a shock, the type of people that Jesus wants in his kingdom. You all know about first century tax collectors. They conspired with Rome. They extorted money out of people. They were actually hated. And Jesus says, follow me. What a clash that is. How can it be, thinks Levi, that I should gain? And he's up, he's up from his chair, isn't he? A new life, following Jesus. Our fourth point, the religious left behind.

[17:15] So the things that Jesus has been doing, they're shocking, aren't they? It's like rewiring a house with the electricity still turned on. That's the sort of thing.

And verse 15, what a sight for the Pharisees. You know, tax collectors and sinners through the front door and into God's kingdom. Look there at verse 15. And as he, Jesus, reclined at table in his house, many, in the tax collector's house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

For there were many who followed him. What a scene. The Pharisees, think about this, the Pharisees tried to separate themselves from sin, don't they?

The temple was a place of separation. The word holy means separation. To them, verse 15 must have been like a den of iniquity.

Ask a Pharisee what their worst nightmare would be and it's verse 15. You know, I could ask a Pharisee, I could say, what's the worst nightmare you've ever had?

[18:22] Well, I woke up in a cold sweat one day and actually my nightmare was that I was reclining at table in my house with tax collectors and sinners. It was awful and I was there and there were many that followed me.

That would be the worst nightmare of a Pharisee. It's an absolute shock. So just imagine that scene. Just imagine it.

It's really actually happening. He's Jesus, the Son of God. He's as holy as God and he's here acquiescing with sinners. And the question that is hanging in the air for us is, will the Pharisees believe the good news of fulfilment or will they try to stall God's unfolding plan?

And it's, listen, it's their opinion of themselves that's the determining factor. think about this. If we think we don't need salvation then obviously we don't need Jesus.

Verse 17. What does Jesus say about that? Look there at verse 17. Jesus says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

[19:39] I came not to call the righteous but sinners. And that's the second mission statement in Mark's Gospel. Listen to this. C.S. Lewis wrote this in his book Mere Christianity.

Christ takes it for granted that men are bad and women in brackets. Until we really feel this assumption of his to be true, though we are part of the world he came to save, we are not part of the audience to whom his words are addressed.

I came not to call the righteous but sinners says Jesus. And in the very next chapter the Pharisees what do they want? They want Jesus dead, don't they?

Chapter 3 verse 6. So the Pharisees are left behind. They think that they're righteous and so they won't be needing Jesus' forgiveness will they?

And I hope there's no one here listening. There's no one listening in. nobody who thinks that they're good enough for God. I suppose the world's made up religions think that.

[20:48] They all front up to God, don't they, with their goodness. Think about this. If I was able to be perfect for the rest of my life which I wouldn't be able to, it couldn't deal with my past sin. Could

it?

It couldn't deal with that. These Pharisees thought they were righteous in their own merit. Jesus simply says I've not come to call the righteous and Isaiah says all your righteous acts are like filthy rags.

Forbid it Lord that I should boast save in the cross of Christ my God. And so the Pharisees are left behind aren't they? Finally a quick final point. The church bought.

Did you notice that the leper, the paralytic and Levi the tax collector, what are they? They're all outsiders. All outsiders reconciled by Jesus and the message that Jesus is so keen to preach is a message of reconciliation.

Those totally excluded from him through sin are invited back. He's, listen, he's the integration point of God's kingdom and this gets to the heart of the incarnation.

[21 : 57] It's where it all converges together friends. Jesus was baptised in the Jordan wasn't he? Chapter 1 with sinners and here he's eating with sinners and then on the cross he's again acquainting with sinners isn't he?

He dies for sinners. People like you and me. And so when Levi got up from his tax booth there was a price to pay. When Jesus said to the paralytic your sins are forgiven there was a price to pay and it was his death wasn't it?

Chapter 10 verse 45 the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And so Jesus was nailed to the cross to become more outcast than the leper more paralysed than the paralytic and more sinful and despised than Levi ever was.

And friend if you trust him if you trust him in a way he becomes more dead than you'll ever be. You see he tastes what ought to be yours which is the anger and the wrath of God.

He takes the Father's anger for your sin if you trust him. Isaiah talks about that doesn't he in chapter 53 took up our iniquities the Lord has laid on him.

[23 : 13] Here it is this Wednesday lunchtime it's the church a leper a paralytic a tax collector and the real you the you that's excluded but for Jesus he reaches out to you and touches you draws you into his kingdom.

What a romance that is. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father we want to thank you this lunchtime for sending your son into this world to die in our place.

We thank you that he rose from the dead and so in him we'll experience what is the consummation of all that went on in our passage today and so our prayer is that we'll live accordingly we'll live lives that reach out and touch that bring a message of salvation to this lost world in Christ's name we pray Amen Amen