

What will you do with Jesus?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 May 2023

Preacher: Lewis MacDonald

[0 : 00] So we're picking up with Mark today, where we find Jesus calling Levi, and we're at an early point with Mark, where he expects the reader, he expects us to work out what we are going to do with this man Jesus, and who we say he is.

So Mark knows who he is, and he tells us right at the beginning of his book, he says, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and he makes that clear right at the start, and from that point, from that verse, right into chapter 3, no one knows who Jesus is, and no one knows what he's about, and no one really knows what he's doing.

So whether the sick come to him, or the outlaws, or the religious leaders, how these people respond to Jesus is what Mark is going to use to force us to respond to him as well.

A key point in this whole book is in chapter 4, and it relates to everything that we're going to say, and everything that comes in Mark, and it's in chapter 4 where Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, so God's ruling power and his love over his people.

He talks about this kingdom growing in an unimaginable way, and spreading in a way people cannot work out. It begins like a mustard seed, but it grows to an unthinkable size, and it grows in a way that no one can understand how it's going to grow.

[1 : 28] That's what Jesus is doing in this chapter, in Mark chapter 2. He's causing God's kingdom to grow. Whether he's healing the sick, or he's spending time with outlaws, or he is completely going against the rule of the day.

He is showing what God's kingdom is like, and he is showing how it's going to grow, and how it will give safety to those who believe.

So in Mark 2, you and I are being asked to respond to Jesus preaching the good news. Are we going to be like the paralytic whose faith has him get up and walk at the sound of Jesus' voice? Are we going to be like the tax collector who leaves his life at the booth and goes and follows after this man? Are we going to celebrate the fact that we find hope in the bridegroom?

Not because of our fasting and our religion, but because of his grace and his love? Or are we going to be like the Pharisee? Are we going to be like the scribe who says that Jesus' words don't count?

[2 : 39] Who says that observing the law is what makes us right and better off? That's the question that Mark puts to you. Before you go any further in this book, what will you do with this man, Jesus?

And how will you respond to his good news? We can think about that today as Jesus meets with Levi the tax collector, and we'll see what he does with this man.

So just three things from these verses, three points. And the first point is that Jesus calls you to new life, but he doesn't call you to forget your old one.

So he calls you to new life, but not to forget where you've come from. We are introduced to this man Levi in this passage, and there's a lot of debate as to who this man is.

He's mentioned here, but by the time you reach for the 12 disciples, he's not mentioned. Levi's not mentioned by name at least, but Matthew's mentioned, and Matthew in his gospel identifies himself as a tax collector called in the same way.

[3 : 49] Levi is the son of Alphaeus, it says here, and yet in the list of the 12 disciples that we have, it's James the son of Alphaeus. So you come to the point, you ask, is Matthew James, or is Matthew Levi, or are these men the same, or are they unrelated?

Is James just a random person? Is Levi a random person? It's up for debate, but it's likely that Levi was Matthew, and the calling of Matthew being almost identical in his gospel in one thing.

But it's very likely that having two names in this culture, we know it's common, so it's likely that Levi is Matthew. We're talking about Matthew, who writes his own gospel.

We'll see in a minute why we should think about this name change and why this name is important. But just before we get to that, think about the life that Jesus is calling Matthew from.

Matthew is no ordinary tax man, and we know that these people are generally hated in this culture that we're reading about, in this day that we're reading about.

[5 : 00] The tax man's not liked, he's not respected. But if you were in Matthew's league, if you were in his tribe, you were especially hated, and you were especially despised, because Matthew's not an ordinary tax man, he doesn't individually go around people collecting taxes.

But he's stationed out by the sea, probably most likely on a busy crossroads, out by Capernaum. So rather than individually collecting taxes, the people are passing by, and they've got to come to him and pay taxes and tolls and tariffs, which are ultimately going to head it.

And so Matthew, who's most likely wrongfully accusing at the same time, and cheating people, and taking more than he should, he is absolutely despised, and he's absolutely hated, because he is putting himself against his own people, and against his own family.

He is denying them, and choosing to work for the oppressor. And he might be living well, in one sense, he might be rich, and he might be doing okay, but in another sense, he's not living well, because he's hated.

And he is as much of an outcast, if not more, than the leper. And yet, Jesus passes by, and he sees this man, and what does he say to him?

[6 : 24] What does he call Matthew to? He calls him to new life. Matthew, whatever he knows, will have heard something about Jesus.

You get that idea, at least, when you see all these crowds just falling after Jesus in chapter 1. Whether he's preaching, or whether he's teaching, whether he's in the synagogues, or going around Galilee, or whether he's healing the sick and the demon-possessed.

Stories about Jesus are definitely spreading. So much so, that Mark says in chapter 1, the whole city was gathered at the door, ready to see him.

So, however long this period is in these two chapters, it's very unlikely that Matthew didn't hear something about Jesus. So then we ask, what must he have heard? Or what would he have heard? I think Matthew must have heard about Jesus entering into Galilee, and calling for repentance. He must have heard about him in the temple in Capernaum, teaching and forcing people to think about God in a way that no other scribe was making them do.

[7 : 33] He must have heard about him healing the sick and saving the poorest people from possession and from evil. And how do you sum that up?

Jesus was everything that Matthew wasn't. Because where Matthew accused his own people, where he harmed them, Jesus came and he sympathized with them.

Where Matthew stole and he took from his people, Jesus came and he promised great life and he promised freedom from suffering. Where Matthew pointed to and lived in fear of the Romans, Jesus came and he didn't point to an oppressive government, but he pointed to God, one who would show grace to anyone who would believe.

So when Jesus comes and he calls Matthew to new life, he isn't calling him to give up some of what he is and keep going with the rest.

No, he calls him to complete new life. He calls him to be everything that he isn't. Jesus calls him, and see, he doesn't force him, he doesn't drag him, but he persuades him with just two words.

[8 : 50] But immediately Matthew goes. Matthew is called by this man who is far greater than him, and he doesn't forget, he doesn't forget to, or he doesn't hesitate to forget to be released from all that he was and to have new life.

If you know Jesus today, if you have obeyed his call to believe in the gospel, remember that you have been released from all that you were.

You've been taken away from it, and you've been called to new life. And we could think we weren't as bad off as Matthew.

We weren't as far gone as he was. The Bible says very clearly we were as far off as Matthew. He says if we've sinned, we've fallen short of God's standard. Yet Jesus calls us to new life.

He tells us it doesn't have to be like this. He tells us we can go after and be with him, and we can enjoy a new life with one who only offers hope and who only offers peace for the rest of our days, no matter who we are.

[10:04] So when Jesus calls Matthew to new life, that's the reminder for us. That's where we've been called from, and that's who we've been called by. And that's what we've been called to.

It's an exciting thing to know and be certain that this man calls us to new life. And to be certain that we are free from all that we were.

We are left with a duty. We are left with a task when we read these verses. And that's to remember where we've been called from.

We're called to new life, but we're not called to forget where we came from. Look at verse 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.

Matthew's not the man that he was, but he's not forgotten where he came from. He's invited those who he worked with to come and meet this man.

[11:17] He has invited the cheats and the thieves and the worst people to come and meet the Savior.

Wherever we've come from, whatever we have been saved from, we don't forget it. Because we have been freed from our own lives and so we are meant to meet with those who are still stuck there.

How do we witness well? How do we point the people we know to Jesus like Matthew did? We remember where we came from.

Because God can use that in an amazing way to show what he is pleased to do in someone's life. He was pleased to bring you from that. And so use that to show to others what God is pleased to do and what he can do.

Matthew was called to new life, but he wasn't called to forget his old one. And by going back for the tax collector, by going back for the worst off in society, what does it say?

[12:21] At the end of verse 15, and they followed him. They saw Matthew's witness and they met with Jesus and they followed him too.

Just quickly, one more reason why we don't forget our old lives. We said at the start that Levi is most likely Matthew. And we have three lists of the 12 disciples.

Mark and Luke, they mention the disciples just by name. They come to Judas and they call him the betrayer. But they mention them just by name. They come to Matthew and it's just Matthew.

Matthew, when he writes his own gospel, and when he comes to the list of the 12 disciples, when he comes to his own name, he doesn't just say Matthew.

He says Matthew, the tax collector. Matthew will not shy away from who he was. And he's not scared to remind himself and he's not scared to remind us who he was before he was called.

[13:25] And he wants us to be clear. He wants us to know, however little we know about Matthew from the rest of the gospels, he wants us to know this.

He was the worst of sinners. He was at the bottom of the pile and yet Jesus saved him. And what does this show us?

But the truth that God's mercy does reach to the lowest and it does pull out the most shameful man. Jesus calls you to new life, but he doesn't call you to forget your old one.

And the reason you're not meant to forget your old life is so that you can use it to witness and so that you will see more clearly in your life how far God would go, how far Christ would go to make you well.

Secondly, Jesus, he calls you to follow him. Jesus calls you to follow him and not to observe laws. Verse 16 says, 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?

[14:42] So we've already said how awful the tax collector is, especially the one who sits by the sea in his booth and how they were despised and outlawed. But again, in this section of Mark, we meet the scribes and the Pharisees.

They keep appearing, these Pharisees and these scribes. in this chapter. And what's interesting is that the problem that they have with the tax collector isn't so much that they're tax collectors.

According to the Pharisee, the problem is that these people don't publicly observe the law. Being a tax collector and stealing, it's not good, but it's not the main concern for the Pharisee.

these people don't observe the law and so they're not righteous. Being a tax collector and a sinner, we go hand in hand in this culture here, but the word that the religious leaders use, they call these men, they use a strong word and they call them sinners.

And that has a far deeper meaning. By the religious leader standard, the sinner was someone who publicly failed to obey religious practices or someone who denied them altogether.

[16:00] So you might be committing tax fraud, you might be stealing, you might be doing the worst to your neighbor. That's not as bad as not following the laws of Judaism.

As far as they are concerned, you are the worst off in society. But, Jesus eats with them. He comes to the house and he sits with them and he eats with them.

And we start to get a hint at what Jesus, we start to get a hint at what Jesus is showing here.

Because you see what really annoys the Pharisee. You see what really annoys the scribe.

Jesus, a man who has been teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, is now in a house with sinners, with people who don't obey the law.

With people who don't obey God's, what they think is God's standard. And in this world here, if you're going to aid with someone, you're obviously pleased to build some sort of bond with them.

[17:03] That's what angers the religious leader. That's what the problem is. If he is really that holy, he shouldn't be eating with these people.

If he can stand in the synagogue and teach us, then he shouldn't be eating with these sinners. But what does he say to Matthew when he meets him?

He doesn't tell him, he doesn't meet Matthew and tell him to observe the law. He tells him to follow him. You see, for Jesus spending his time with these men and eating with them, he doesn't expect them to find righteousness in themselves by doing the right thing or by observing the law or practicing the religion.

But he shows grace and mercy and he calls them to follow him. The Pharisees didn't, well, they did expect that God's kingdom is going to come, but they expected that it was only going to come through people doing right and observing the law and becoming righteous.

That's why they are angry. But Jesus comes and he says, it's already come and it's going to grow because God is gracious and he's going to allow sinners to come in if they follow after him.

[18:28] If you haven't put your trust in him today, if you don't know Jesus, the only question is, is it religion that drives you? Is it observing the law that gives you safety?

Is it doing well and living right that makes you feel good? That's what you need to work out. That's what Jesus pushes against when he comes and he eats with these men.

Where Isaiah says that your good deeds are like a polluted garment and where Paul says your salvation is not a result of works, Jesus comes to that and he gives you the hope that you need and he says, follow me.

You are called to follow Jesus, not to observe the law. Just before we move on, you've got to make some boundaries around that.

You aren't called to neglect the law. In other words, you can't do what you want. It's not a case of being saved and then doing as you please and forgetting altogether God's law. It's the complete opposite.

[19:42] You're only able to do well. You're only able to follow God's law once you've followed him. And you're only able to follow him because of his mercy and his concern for the lowest of sinners.

Good works won't bring you in like the Pharisees thought. But you are able to do them when you follow. And this word follow, it's used to take away any sense that this is a half-hearted thing.

It's not a sense of following after him a wee bit and doing as you please the rest of the time. This is a whole-hearted thing. This is where the disciples who were fishermen laid down their nets and left their lives behind and went after him.

This is where Matthew leaves his booth, leaves his life there and goes after Jesus and follows him. You are called to follow and you are called to leave aside everything that you were.

But you're not called to observe the law. It's the other way about it. The one who calls you, the one who says follow me, gives you the grace and gives you the ability to do it.

[21:02] Helping you to live as someone brought into God's kingdom. Lastly, you are called by the great physician or the word here is doctor.

You're called by the doctor. The key question in this chapter that Mark gives to the reader is what are you going to do with this man Jesus? And we've seen what he calls us to and what he's not called us to.

He's called us to new life but not to forget the old. He's called us to follow him but not to observe laws. And as you think about what you make of that, if you haven't already, it forces you to ask,

what am I going to do with this man?

Am I going to leave this old life and go after one who promises new? Or am I going to let him pass by and go on without me? Am I going to follow him and have a relationship with him?

Or will I just settle for observing the law and force him out? The way Jesus calls you in this passage brings you to a point where you have to answer that question.

[22 : 15] Just to close, one more way in which we are forced to answer this and it's not to do with what you are called to do but it's to do with who you are called by. Verse 17 says, When Jesus heard it he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick and I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Jesus makes a very obvious point here in one sense. The healthy have no need for a doctor. The healthy don't need a physician but the one who is sick does.

That's the illustration that he gives us. In the same way the righteous don't need a saviour but the sinner does. What did the Pharisee believe?

They believed that observing the law would make you righteous. To fit that into Jesus' illustration they would say that the sick man can heal himself by observing the law.

And Jesus comes and he says, No. that's what he does. That's his mission. To find the sick and to make them well. To find the sinner and to make him righteous.

[23 : 33] To make him ready to enter into God's kingdom. He is the great physician. And what about the righteous? What does Jesus say about the righteous?

They don't exist is what he says. There is no such person. None is righteous Paul says. If you have responded to Jesus' call if you believe in the gospel you are in the care of the great physician.

One who has promised to make you spiritually well and one who maintains that promise throughout your whole life. If you don't like that call if you don't understand your need to respond Jesus says you're not righteous in yourself.

But he came into this world to find you and to make you whole and to make you well. What will you do with Jesus? You're called to to new life but not to forget your old.

You're called to follow him and not to observe laws. You're called by him who is the great physician. Let's pray in response to this passage.

[24 : 46] Our Lord we thank you for your word. We thank you for how Jesus calls Matthew and how he brings him out of the depths and how he gives him new life and how he shows us that this will not happen by us observing the law but this will happen by us hearing Jesus' call to follow him and to go after him.

We thank you for Jesus who came into this world for this sake to make the unwell well and to make the unrighteous righteous and to build his kingdom. So we thank you for these things and we pray that you'd help us as we think on them.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.