

JESUS CAME TO CALL SINNERS

Mark 2:1-17

Key Verse: 2:17

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Today's passage includes two events: Jesus heals a paralytic, and Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to be one of his disciples. By healing a paralytic, Jesus reveals that he has power to forgive human sins. By calling a man named Levi, Jesus reveals that he came to call sinners, not the righteous. Jesus' calling Levi the tax collector reveals that any kind of wretched person can be recreated into a most useful person in the world. May God help us to welcome Jesus into our hearts and into our lives, as Levi did!

I. JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC (1-12)

Look at verses 1,2. "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them." Jesus spend a good many days for his evangelistic work in nearby villages. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered at the house that there was no room left, not even outside the door. What did Jesus do for them? Jesus immediately began to teach them the word of God. The crowd gathered there, hoping that he would solve their life problems. But Jesus taught them the word of God. Why? Jesus believed that the word of God gives them life. Jesus believed that the word of God gives man joy and peace. Jesus believed that the word of God gives man the Spirit of God to overcome the world. The word of God can set them free from the bondage of sin (Jn 8:31-32).

Someone interrupted their Bible study. Look at verse 3. "Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them." They were five friends. They were very dear to each other. But one day, one of them had a stroke and became a paralytic. His four friends felt as if they had a stroke themselves. They had great compassion for their friend. But they were utterly helpless. One day they heard the news that Jesus had come to Capernaum. They heard about how Jesus healed many sick people, including a man with leprosy (1:29-45). The four friends said to each other, "This is it. This is a God-given chance for us to help our friend!" Suddenly they were confident that their paralytic friend would get well with Jesus' help. Carrying their sick friend, they came to the house where Jesus was teaching the Bible. However, the house was filled with a big crowd. They pushed and waded through the crowd, trying to get him to Jesus. But too many people had already crammed around Jesus, hoping Jesus would heal their own sickness. Some had stomach ulcer, some had backaches, and some others had hemorrhoids. Each one thought that his or her case was most urgent. No one wanted to concede. But the friends of the paralytic could not give up. Where there was a will, there was a way. Suddenly the four friends had a brilliant idea.

What did they do? Look at verse 4. “Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.” In doing so, they must have offended many people. The owner of the house might have called the police. Other people were angry, because they sneaked into the room ahead them.

However, the four friends were so determined to get their friends to Jesus that they did not mind hearing all the screaming and complaining of the crowd. There is a saying, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” They were indeed beautiful friends to the paralytic. Their compassionate hearts toward him were flaring intensely, so intensely that they could not help stop themselves from climbing up on the roof and digging a hole through the roof above Jesus, and lowering the friend in front of Jesus. They brought him to Jesus, overcoming all obstacles. Though paralysis was known to be incurable, it did not matter to them. They brought the man to Jesus, believing that Jesus would make him whole.

What did Jesus think of these men’s action that caused such a commotion? Look at verse 5a. Jesus saw their faith. The crowd saw only their destructive behavior and criticized them. But Jesus saw their beautiful hearts, their shepherd hearts, and above all, their faith in the Savior. They had a great faith in Jesus’ healing power. May God give this kind faith to each of us!

The shepherd heart and challenging faith of the four men made it possible for them to bring their friend to Jesus. We must learn from them their courage and challenging faith, as we try to bring our friends to Jesus. But this isn’t easy. This generation seems to seek an easier way for everything. Even young people want to sit down comfortably and press remote control buttons. When some difficulties arise or faced with challenging problems, they tend to give up easily. We cannot take our paralytic friends to Jesus if we give up because of some obstacles, because there are plenty of obstacles, such as peer pressure and all kinds of temptation from the world. Robert E. Peary (1856-1920) tried to explore the North Pole but failed his first five attempts. He was lying in a hospital bed, with his eight toes cut off from frostbite. But the determined Peary wrote on the wall, “I will find a way. If not, I will make a way.” He overcame his despair and challenged again. He became the first person who discovered the North Pole. We need this kind of challenging spirit as we try to help our friends to come to Jesus.

What did Jesus do for the paralytic? First, Jesus called him “son.” Look at verse 5. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” To people’s eyes, this paralytic was pathetic; he was burdensome and smelly to everyone he met. But to Jesus, he was like one of his own sons. To Jesus, he was one who was created in the image of God. Jesus hoped that he would be fully restored. Jesus hoped that he would be a hard-working man. Jesus hoped that he would be a blessing to

others instead of being a burden. So Jesus called him, "Son." It meant, "My son, you will be all right." Second, Jesus said to him, "Your sins are forgiven." His friends thought that the paralysis was the problem. The man also thought that the paralysis was the source of all his problems. But Jesus looked at his problem differently. Jesus knew this man needed to be healed of his paralysis. But Jesus did not think that paralysis was his fundamental problem; Jesus knew that it was sin that made him paralyzed. Jesus knew that it was sin that made him utterly powerless. Jesus wanted to solve his root problem, that is, his sin problem. So Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

Let's think for a moment about how paralysis may be compared to sin. We don't know how this man became a paralytic. Maybe he had a massive stroke that left him without feelings in his arms and legs. He could not move, so he could not but depend on others to help him all the time. He was a burden to others on a full-time basis, instead of being a blessing. The paralytic was the kind of person the world would be better off without. In the Bible, a paralytic is regarded as a representative sinner, for he is powerless to do anything. Like paralysis, sin makes man powerless (Ro 5:6). Sin makes man lazy. Sin deprives man of holy desires. On the other hand, sin fills a man with sinful desires like growing weeds. There are many spiritual paralytics in this world. One young man couldn't overcome his lustful desire. He gave up his medical studies and died of one-sided love at the age of 21.

It is amazing to see Jesus loved this paralytic and wanted to help him. Jesus is indeed the good shepherd for even hopeless paralytics. But there were some people who were unhappy about Jesus' shepherd heart. Look at verses 6-7. When the religious leaders heard Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven," they thought to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They did not see Jesus' compassion on the paralytic. They did not see that Jesus is the Messiah promised to come. They were spiritually blind. They were so jealous that they only wanted to kill Jesus.

Jesus knew that they did not know about man's fundamental problem, that is, the sin problem. So he said in verses 9,10, "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat 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 tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

The environment was very hostile. If Jesus wanted to help this man further, he had to risk his life. But Jesus decided to demonstrate his power to forgive the man's sins (10). Jesus looked around at the people for a while, and then turned his attention to the paralytic and said, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (11). Look at verse 12a. "He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all." What a great sight! Historically, people did not even know what sin was, though they suffered endlessly because of sin. Even if they knew what sin was, they were helpless to do anything; all they could do was to worship the moon or the stars or a rock or an old tree.

In history, Jesus is the only one who has power to forgive sins. So Jesus wants us to come to him to receive the forgiveness of sins.

When the people of Capernaum saw the paralytic pick up his mat and walk, they marveled. They said, "We have never seen anything like this!" (12b) People marveled at Jesus' power to forgive man's sins. Jesus' declaration of his power to forgive man's sin is indeed good news to all mankind.

II. JESUS CALLS LEVI THE TAX COLLECTOR (13-17)

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them the word of God (13). Jesus gave the word of life to people wherever they gathered -- in a house, on the temple court, on the mountainside, and beside the lake. Jesus is the good shepherd who leads his sheep to the green pasture to eat abundant food.

Look at verse 14. "As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him." As Jesus passed by the village tax collector's booth, he saw a man sitting lonely in the office. People hurriedly passed by him, making faces at him. But Jesus did not ignore him as the people did. Jesus called Levi and asked him to follow him.

Then who was Levi? He was a tax collector in Capernaum, a trade center in Palestine. In what respect was Levi a sinner? At that time, Israel was colonized by the powerful Roman Empire. The Roman government hired Jewish agents to collect taxes. These tax collectors were hated by their fellow countrymen for helping their ruler and for frequently defrauding their own people. In order to make money, they often collected more than they were supposed to and pocketed for their selfish gain (Lk 3:12-13). They were called "public sinners." If the paralytic was a powerless sinner, Levi represented a selfish sinner.

Levi thought that money would make him happy. So he wanted to make as much money as he could, by any means. He made some money. But in the course of making money, he became a person who was called a public sinner, one who did anything if only he could make money. In short, Levi became a selfish man. These days, selfishness seems to be accepted as a normal behavior. The devil has deceived many people to regard selfish life as a norm in this capitalistic society. But as we learned in Genesis, God created us to be sources of blessing, not to be selfish. Spiritually speaking, selfish people are comparable to men with leprosy, because they are as harmful to others as a man with leprosy. Selfishness is as contagious as leprosy.

What happened to this selfish person? Levi wanted to attain happiness in his life. Contrary to his wishes, he was captured by the power of sin and death. Levi had some money, but he was not happy. He had no real friend who could share life's moments of

joy and sorrow. Everyone despised him for what he did to make a living. Even his dog Nero seemed to bark at him for sucking blood of his own people. He had everything in his mansion, including a big garage for his shiny chariots, heated swimming pool, and a big screen TV. But his heart was troubled because of his guilty feelings. He would hear wailing sound of a mother when he took away her only child's tuition money. At night, he would suffer from nightmares. And he was very fearful because he was living under the shadow of death. These days, many young people cannot go to bed early because they are afraid of nightmares. To most young people, going to bed late at night and getting up late seems to have become a part of American culture. Likewise, Levi was haunted by fear and guilty feeling, despite his financial security. How did Jesus help him?

Jesus saw Levi and said to him, "Follow me." To people's eyes, Levi was too dirty to look at. They felt sick to their stomach to see the selfish scum. When we look at selfish people, we are disgusted because they are as dirty as a man with leprosy. Selfish people make other sick. But Jesus saw something else in Levi. He saw that Levi was a lost sheep, wandering without meaning and purpose in life. Jesus saw his inner agony. Jesus saw that his soul was dying because of his sins and the resulting condemnation. Jesus saw that the image of God was disfigured in him because of his selfishness. Unlike the village people, Jesus did not see him with eyes of judgment, but with eyes of compassion. He called Levi in order to restore the image of God in him.

When Jesus said, "Follow me," he meant, "Come and learn of me and be my disciple." Levi was a man of ability, but his ability was misused. When Jesus called him by saying, "Follow me," Jesus wanted to help him until he became a new person who could overcome his selfishness and be a source of blessing to many other people. "Follow me" was the voice of salvation, love and hope to Levi. It was the historic moment a selfish man's life was about to be transformed into a man of positive influence. Indeed, this same man, who had been so selfish, later became St. Matthew who recorded the beautiful Sermon on the Mount.

What happened when Levi met Jesus personally? He experienced heavenly joy in his heart. He could not keep the joy to himself. So, for the first time, he spent much money to prepare a great dinner. He invited Jesus, the disciples, and all his tax collector friends to the dinner party. This was the expression of his thanksgiving to Jesus; it was the expression of his spiritual joy. It was a party to celebrate his new life.

The dinner party was very joyful. Everyone, especially the disciples, ate a lot, munching and crunching (15). But there were some people who were not happy about the joyful party. They were the teachers of the law. Perhaps they were in the middle of their regular fasting period. They walked around with serious faces, showing off their self-righteousness. Then they heard the sound of joyful laughs in Levi's house. And they saw Jesus eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors. They asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?" (16) These religious men despised

and rejected Levi and his friends and branded them as public sinners. They did not even try to understand their agony. They were supposed to be shepherds for God's flock, but they had no shepherd's heart.

What did Jesus say to them? Let us read verse 17. "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" This verse reveals that Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous. The Jewish religious leaders only passed judgment on the tax collector Levi and his friends, out of their self-righteousness. They even criticized Jesus for having an eating fellowship with them. But Jesus came to help the sin-sick people. He came to heal their wounded hearts and lives. Each of us is a kind of sinner -- a sinner like the paralytic or like the tax collector. Without Jesus we cannot but live as sinners, like paralytics or tax collectors. Men are helpless without Jesus. Without Jesus we are all sin-sick. But thank God for sending Jesus as our Savior.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus helped a paralytic and Levi the tax collector. One was a burdensome sinner, the other a selfish sinner. We learn that only Jesus has power to forgive man's sins. Most of all, Jesus came to call sinners like us and to heal us. Praise Jesus!