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 tells us about two stories: Jesus heals a paralyzed man and he calls Levi as his disciple. These two stories teach us many important lessons to know who Jesus is and who we are.

First, Son, your sins are forgiven (1-5) Look at verses 1-2. “***A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them***.” In the end of chapter one, Jesus healed a man with leprosy. After healing the man, Jesus warned him not to tell anyone about his healing because Jesus thought that the time for himself to appear in public had not yet come. But the healed man went out and spread the news. As a result, many people who heard about Jesus’ homecoming gathered to see him. Jesus continued to teach the good news of salvation. While he was teaching in a house, an unexpected thing happened. Look at verses 3-4. “***Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.***” Some men broke the roof and lowered a paralyzed man before Jesus, who was teaching inside. A typical house in the Middle East had a flat roof accessible by means of an outside staircase. The roof was often made of a thick layer of clay, supported by mats of branches across wooden beams. (TNIV Study Bible, Zondervan) Therefore, it took time for the men to open the roof, making lots of dust and noise. People inside the house must have been very upset about the men who broke other’s property and disturbed Jesus’ teaching. They must have thought the guys were rude, selfish, and lacking common sense.

How did Jesus respond to these people? Look at verse 5. “***When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.***” Jesus saw their behavior differently from others. Jesus saw it as their act of faith. Jesus saw their faith. What and how Jesus sees things is often different from what and how we see them. People saw their behavior as an act of rudeness and violation, but Jesus saw it as an act of faith. What kind of faith did they have that pleased Jesus? They had absolute faith in Jesus’ power of healing. Paralysis is an incurable disease. Once the nervous system is damaged, it is near impossible to restore it. But the four friends of this paralyzed man believed that Jesus could heal their friend. They believed that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Do you have absolute faith in God? Do you have confidence in what you believe? What is faith? Faith is believing in God’s existence and his power and love. Faith is believing that God is living, working, loving, saving, caring, even here today.

They also had obstacle-overcoming faith. They confronted an obstacle which blocked their access to Jesus, which was the crowd. But they didn’t give up. They went up to the roof, opened it, and lowered their friend down before Jesus. When we come to Jesus or bring someone to Jesus, we always confront obstacles. The obstacles could be friends, roommates, busy schedules, tough school studies, parties, sickness, weather, and so on. Living by faith means overcoming one obstacle after another and come to God. They also had a faith that put their friendship into practice. Faith is proved by action. James 2:17&26 says, faith without action is dead. These four friends loved this paralyzed friend. They did not sit down and only express sympathy toward him. They put the man onto a mat and brought him to Jesus. They showed true friendship. Jesus said in John 15:13 which says, ““*There is no greater love than this: that a person would lay down his life for the sake of his friends.*” (ABPE) Jesus called his disciples “friends.” As he said, Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross. By doing so, Jesus taught us what true love is, and he demonstrated his love for us.

Now let’s think about Jesus' words to this man. Jesus said, “***Son, your sins are forgiven***.” It is amazing that Jesus called him ‘son’. This calling is God the Creator’s calling to one of his creatures. Our God is the heavenly Father and we are his children. We are his sons and daughters. This calling is also the Messiah’s compassion on a sinner. Jesus had pity on this man. Jesus didn’t ask him why he became paralyzed or how long he had suffered, but Jesus proclaimed the forgiveness of his sin. This means that Jesus saw his fundamental problem as a sin problem beyond his physical illness. Of course, not all illness is caused by sin, but most of them are. Sin is separation from God. Separation from God caused the origin of sin and death. When Adam sinned, God said, “You will surely die.” (Ge 2;17, 3:19) Today many people are sick, suffering, and dying from various reasons and diseases. Thank God that we have many good hospitals, doctors, nurses, medical systems and programs. Still, we need the eyes of Jesus to see the fundamental problems which cause our sickness. We don’t give only painkillers to a cancer patient. They need a more fundamental treatment than just relieving pain. Jesus saw the paralyzed man’s fundamental problem as a sin problem, a separation from God. Jesus helped him to be reunited with God by forgiving his sins.

Second, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. (6-12) What Jesus said to the paralyzed man challenged the religious leaders. Look at verses 6-7. “***Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone***?” Blasphemy is an act of offense, an insult against God. The religious leaders thought that Jesus offended God by making himself equal with God. They thought that only God can forgive sins, but they did not know that Jesus is God the Incarnate. Jesus is God who appeared as a man. (Jn 1;14) How did Jesus respond to them? Verses 8-11 says, “***Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins***.” Jesus knew what they were thinking in their minds because Jesus is able to read all men. Which is easier for you? In fact, both are difficult and impossible for men to do. But they are easy and possible with God. To say, “your sins are forgiven,’ sounds easier because no one can prove it. On the other hand, to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk” seems easier because some magicians can do so. Here, the point is that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. As the religious leaders said, “No one can forgive sins but God alone.” Jesus forgives our sins because he is God.

Look at verses 11-12. “***So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”***  Jesus healed the paralyzed man. As Jesus said, the man was healed. By raising the man, Jesus proved that he has the authority to forgive sins. Healing is the proof and evidence of Jesus’ authority. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He rose again from the dead on the third day. His resurrection is the evidence and proof that he conquered death and forgave the sins of the world. It is important for us to come to Jesus. It is also important to hear his word and obey them. The word of Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins and heal the sick. Jesus said, whoever hears my word will cross from death to life. (John 5:24) Jesus also said, whoever studies my word will know the truth and the truth will set us free. (John 8:31,32) Amen!

Third, Jesus came to call sinners. (13-17) This part tells us how Jesus called Levi. While Jesus was walking along the Lake Galilee, he saw Levi sitting at a tax collector’s booth. Jesus called to him, “***Follow me***”. Levi got up and followed Jesus. (13-14) Levi was a tax collector. At the time, tax collectors were treated as public sinners by their own people. This is because tax collectors were hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from their own people, giving an allotted amount to the authorities and keeping the rest in their own pockets. The more they collected, the more they saved for themselves. People hated tax collectors and treated them as traitors. Jesus called such a selfish and money-pinching tax collector Levi as his disciple. In chapter one, Jesus called the four fishermen as his disciples and now he calls a tax collector. In God’s calling, there is no discrimination, racism, or elitism. Jesus called his disciples from anyone from any place according to his sovereign plan and will.

Levi, later, became St. Matthew. Such a smelly and selfish tax collector was changed into St. Matthew, the teacher of the world, because he followed Jesus. In the past, he followed money. When he followed money, he was lost. In fact, he did not know where he was going. He didn’t know how to live with himself. There are many hard-working people in this world, on campus, at the workplace, at home, and so on. It is sorry to say that many of them have no idea where they are going. They just follow the pattern of this world. Jesus gave Levi a clear life direction, a new life for God and for the world. Jesus called him to be the light of the world and a teacher of all nations. Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (Jn 8:12)

Look at verses 15-16. “***While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?***” At that time, eating with someone at the same table was a sign of intimacy and equality. They regarded them as family. According to the Jewish custom and tradition, a rabbi must not sit with sinners, not to mention the Messiah with tax collectors. The religious leaders judged Jesus unclean like the sinners and tax collectors. What did Jesus say to them?

Let us read verse 17 together. “***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.”*** In this verse, Jesus saw sinners as patients who need a doctor. Jesus came as a doctor for the sick, sick from sin. Jesus came to call sinners and to save them. The Bible says that there is no one righteous on this earth, not even one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:11, 23) All sinned and became sick and are dying. All need healing and the forgiveness of sin. The Bible says that if there is anyone who says he is without sin, he is a liar and there is no truth in his heart. But if we confess our sins, our God is faithful and just that he forgives all our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9) Jesus wants us to come to him as we are. We don’t have to disguise ourselves to be righteous. Jesus knows all things about all of us, you and me. Jesus wants us to be healed and saved. Like this paralyzed man, we need faith that Jesus can forgive my sins and give me new life. Jesus did not come to call self-righteous men, but broken and helpless sinners. Tim Keller said, “The church is not a museum for holy saints, but a hospital for broken sinners.” Amen!

Today, please remember these two words of Jesus: **“Son, your sins are forgiven,”** and **“Follow me!”** I pray that God may bless all of you to follow Jesus and become a blessing to the world as disciples of Jesus, kingdom builders, and history makers. Amen.