

Righto, let me set the scene:

We've come back to our series on the Gospel of Mark. It's the shortest, and the fastest moving, of all of the Gospels. And as I said in the very first message of this series, a key verse would have to be **10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**

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As the Gospel of Mark unfolds, we're going to see, an increasing conflict between the Jewish religious leaders, and Son of God... – a conflict that will eventually lead to the cross...

And so some people would go “Was Jesus naïve? Did He have no political nous about Him at all???”

- Surely He could've handled things better;
- He could've been a bit less offensive in what He chose to say;
- He could've gone about His ministry in a way that didn't ruffle so many feathers – especially with the religious leaders who were so respected, and so powerful...
- Imagine what Jesus could've achieved, if His life hadn't of been cut short...

But that was the point (you see)... Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this earth, to give His life as a ransom for many. He revealed God as God truly is, and the religious establishment couldn't handle Him...

Jesus didn't come to 'tidy up', a system of God worship that just needed a little bit of tweaking... Jesus came to save; He came to give His life as a ransom for many; and the fact that the religious establishment couldn't handle it, well that was the mechanism through which Jesus was going to **give** His life...

And so Jesus' mission depended not on 'maintaining some level of 'common ground'' – it was about breaking into new ground, and in so-doing, exposing the bankruptcy of what religion had become...

And today's reading, is the second of five stories (one coming straight after another), and each one demonstrating this growing conflict (between Jesus and those who presumed to speak for God)...

So, our last message on the Gospel of Mark, was 2:1-12, which is a well-known story, of the healing of the paraplegic – These men brought their mate to Jesus, but they couldn't get into the house, so they dug a hole through the roof, and lowered him down to Jesus...

And Jesus saw that that man's greatest need, was the forgiveness of sins...

- He forgave him his sins; (which BTW, upset the Scribes [**"Who can forgive sins, but God alone**]);
- And so, to prove that Jesus has the **authority** to forgive sins (and is therefore God), He said "Get up and walk";
- And the paraplegic did exactly that....
- and all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this"

And so it shouldn't be any surprise (after that spectacular healing), that when Jesus heads out to teach again (by the sea), He draws quite a crowd...

But today's reading doesn't focus on Jesus' interaction with the crowd – it focuses on Jesus' interaction with one man... And it's not even someone who went out to the seaside to hear Him... It's a tax collector, by the name of Levi...

As Jesus 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.

Alright, so what's so significant about this??? Well, vs 15,16&17, give us a bit of a hint... Jesus had a meal in Levi's house... and many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ 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?"

The two go together, don't they? Tax Collectors & Sinners; Sinners & Tax Collectors; Tax Collectors & Sinners...

What's wrong with being a tax collector???

Well, nearly everybody hates having to pay tax...

The strange thing is, we all want the government to do more for us. We want:

- the world's best medical care;
- well-resourced schools and free or subsidised universities
- access to pensions and other forms of welfare
- aged care to be funded
- armed forces - defence
- financial support in times of drought or natural disaster
- them to ensure we have cheap, 'clean' energy
- better roads
- more police; more teachers; more doctors; more nurses;
- higher wages;
- higher profits.....

We want all this stuff, but none of us want to pay any tax...

I know business people who almost think their throat has been cut if they have to pay any tax... I also know wage earners who invest in a bunch of 'negative gearing' investments, so they don't have to pay any tax...

Not many people enjoy paying tax – in fact, most people hate it.... We expect the government to provide all this stuff for us, but we don't want to pay any tax...

*But imagine, that you weren't paying tax to your government, so that it could afford to provide the services of government...
Imagine that you were paying tax to your oppressor...*

Imagine that a world superpower looked upon Australia, coveted our natural resources, and so their armies invaded...

- *Imagine that a foreign superpower, occupied this land...*
- *We lost the war, and became a subjugated people...*
- *Imagine that foreign power, took what they wanted from our country,*
- *and to fund their war machine, they levied taxes upon us...*
- ***Some** of the money would be spent in this country, to pay the wages of soldiers whose job it was, to control us, and to stamp out any resistance...*
- *But imagine that much of our taxes went back to the foreign nation, for it to build its empire*

How would they collect such taxes?

- *Imagine they employed some locals...*
- *people who knew the Australian psyche, and who know how we would try and ferret our money away, and hide it from our oppressor...*
- *These people would be given authority to collect the taxes for the foreign power, and they would be rewarded handsomely for it...*

What would you think of such a person??? A turn-coat; a collaborator; a traitor....

Now, if you can imagine that scenario, you are now picturing the tax collector in Israel... They collected taxes in the name of King Herod, who wasn't a real king of Israel, but a puppet-king of the Roman Empire who occupied and subjugated the nation of Israel...

Tax collectors were hated... They were the worst of the worst... They sold out their countrymen for greed... They extracted money from the citizens, with the might of the Roman military at their back, and they built their prosperity at the oppression of the masses...

Do you understand why the Tax Collectors were hated - & why they were seen as sinners???? They were traitors to their country; They were traitors to their people; and therefore they were seen as traitors to God...

And that's why the call of Levi, is so significant...

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If you could have input into a person's life – an input that could deeply influence them, and lead them to be 'born again', who would you seek to spend your time with??? (And I want you to think outside of your family – that's a given – [Most of us want to put some effort into seeing our family come to Christ])... But apart from your family, what person, or what **sort** of person, would you put your time into???

- friends?
- people you like?
- those who you work with?
- those who are on the same level of the social strata, as what you are

- Would it be those sorts of people, who you think
“They’re a really nice person – they’d make a good Christian...”

We might call it “Friendship evangelism”, where we intentionally target those who are like us... And there’s nothing wrong with doing this – everybody needs a saviour (even our friends, and those who are like us) – even **they** need a saviour, because we **all** need a saviour...

But here’s the thing:

What was most shocking, to those who presumed to speak for God, is the fact that Jesus was willing to ‘rub shoulders’ with the scum-of-the-earth...

You see, the Scribes and Pharisees – they tried to be holy, by separating themselves off from those who weren’t holy... They didn’t want the filth of those sinners to rub-off on them.

And they would **never, never eat** with a person like Levi...

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Did you know, that who you choose to eat with, is important???

When we eat with someone, we connect with them, and we share in their lives, and we bring them into **our** lives... That’s the image that David gives us in Psalm 23, where He says:

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

He's painting a picture of the hospitality of God... – the intimacy, of being invited to dinner with God...

In Rev 3, Jesus said: ²⁰ **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**

When we eat with someone, it's not just a matter of getting fuel into the stomach – It's a matter of bringing people into our circle, and into our lives... When we eat a meal with someone, we bring them into our home – we bring them into our family – we bring them into our extended relationships...

Who we have over for dinner, matters... And who we **exclude** from dinner matters too...

Most of us are pretty careful about who we invite into our homes... But imagine the barriers, that would be broken down, if we opened our homes, and we opened our dinner table, to the outcast; and the despised; – to the hated, and the sinner....

It would have to be 17 or 20 years ago, a young man, (who at one time, was a regular visitor to our dinner table), became very disconnected. And I believe the Lord revealed to me, what the issue was. And so I visited him, and I said to him, "Over the last couple of months, our church, and I personally, have been standing up to confirm that the homosexual lifestyle

is a sin... Is this a sin that you secretly struggle with?" And he broke down in tears, and he said, "Who told you???" And I said, "Nobody's told me your secret – only God..."

And this young man assumed, that because I believed the homosexual lifestyle is a sin, and as with all sins, needs to be repented of, I would hate him, and have nothing to do with him, if I knew the truth about him...

And he could not believe, that Robyn and I, would still have him over to our place for dinner... You see, he thought that to be against sin, was to be like a Pharisee, and that we would have to cut ourselves off from Him, because he was a sinner, and he'd make our family dirty... No. To be against sin, is to be like Jesus...

Jesus didn't cut Himself off – He connected with those who needed saving.

V15 says:

many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

Now, that could mean, :

- a) that there were **many** people who were following Jesus, and because of the sheer numbers, the normal proportion of tax collectors and sinners amongst them, added up to a decent number; or
- b) It could **also** mean, and I think this is closer to the truth, that the ministry and teaching of Jesus, was attracting an inordinately large proportion, of tax collectors and sinners... – There was something different about Jesus

(and His teaching), that didn't just bring the general populous.... It particularly appealed to the tax collectors and sinners - They were the ones who were following Him...

And the Pharisees would have screwed up their nose, and gone "Eowww"... "Why would He eat with them???"

And in Jesus' reply, we find a monumental statement, that gives the whole grounding of the ministry of Jesus, and the mission of the Gospel. And this statement, is something that you and I, would do well to grasp, for our own ministry and mission:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Wow!!!

It's not the well who need a doctor – it's the sick. It's not the righteous who need a saviour – it's the sinner...

Who is our mission to???

- those who are like us?
- all the 'nice' people?
- all those who will 'fit the mould' of what people in our church are like?

Or is our mission to:

- the sinner;
- the immoral;

- the criminal;
- Or, is our mission to the Murray;
- the Bogan;
- alcoholic
- addict.....

The mission of Jesus, and therefore our mission, is a mission to the spiritually sick – it's a mission to the sinner...

And, here's the thing with Jesus' monumental statement...
If Jesus came for the spiritually sick – if Jesus came for the sinner: Who are the spiritually sick? Who is the sinner???

Well, I know who the Pharisees thought the sinners were... –
– it was all those 'other' people...

But we know better than that. The Scribes and the Pharisees weren't right with God, either... They were just as sick, but they didn't recognise their illness... They were just as broken, but they didn't recognise their own sinfulness... They were just as much in need of a saviour, but they didn't recognise their own predicament.

And so, Jesus came for all sinners, including the religious leaders... The thing is, the tax collectors and sinners, knew they needed a saviour, and so they found hope in Jesus Christ... The scribes and Pharisees, felt they were above Jesus, and so they rejected Him...

Now, when Jesus passed by Levi, he didn't just offer Levi a bit of forgiveness – He called him to follow him.

And Jesus didn't just come to give a 'dose of salvation' to the sinners and the tax collectors – He came to **call them** as well. What does that mean???

I'll tell you what it means:

Jesus came to call sinners to become His disciples, and the call of Jesus, encompasses everything that discipleship is...

- to be called by Jesus, means to leave behind our life of sin;
- to leave behind our life of greed; and selfishness;
- It's to leave behind our immorality and deceit;

- And it means to follow Jesus, as disciples of Jesus.

Why is this church called "Bush Disciples"? It's because we want to follow Jesus, as His disciples...

- It's to give our hearts to Him;
- to repent of our sin, and receive forgiveness in Him...
- And to live for Him

Last week, we talked about being born again – well let me tell ya, to respond to the call of Jesus, is to be born again...

Now, I don't know whether it's an excuse, or whether people genuinely feel this way, but I've heard it expressed (many times), "I'm not good enough to become a Christian"... What a load of rubbish... Jesus came, **only** for those who feel they're not good enough... And the mission field, is filled with those who aren't good enough... And guess what???

When someone realises that they're not good enough for Jesus, that's when they're finally ready to respond to the call of Jesus, when He says, "Come. Follow me."

So, has anyone been challenged by God's word this morning??? If not, you might be more deaf than what I am.

I reckon a very real challenge for us today, is to be disciples of Jesus, who will eat with tax collectors and sinners... Why? Because these people, are the ones who Jesus seeks and saves, and we're the ones who have the message of salvation...

Questions?