

Religion or Relationship?

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 00] I am fighting the allergy thing, I guess. So I'm going to have you turn to Peter, 1 Peter.

We're going to read, but then I'm going to take you to another place. But let's start in Peter, and then I'll explain to you what we're going to do. It's a little bit unusual for me.

We are currently working our way verse by verse through this wonderful book of 1 Peter. And we are in chapter 2. We have come to the place in chapter 2 where everything now that Peter is going to say to us hinges on what he's covering in verse 12.

Verse 12 of chapter 2. Just about everything that remains in the book of 1 Peter from here out is going to revolve around the theme, the topic, the emphasis, the thrust of thought, the main idea that we capture in verse 12.

So let's read in 1 Peter chapter 2 beginning in verse 12. I'll go down just a little ways here. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.

[1 : 20] That is his concern. How he fleshes that out in the way that we're supposed to live is the rest of the book. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.

Notice, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers. Now he's not saying there's a potential for this. He's saying this will happen.

They are going to slander you. That's already taking place in many of your lives. They may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, do what, church?

Glorify God in the day of visitation. This is his primary concern. That seeing the good life of honesty, integrity, but primarily love for Christ.

Love for Christ. Devotion to Jesus in their lives. Where they're not being thwarted to pity parties. They're not being distracted into defending themselves or campaigning for their rights or whatever it is.

[2 : 32] Peter is saying as they see this humble devotion and love for Christ in your life. Out of the good works that you're living, even toward the people who are slandering you.

They may come to give glory to God on the day of visitation. That is the day of their own salvation. This is Peter's concern. And so throughout the rest of the book, what he wants to put across as a main idea is suffer well for Christ.

Bring glory to God. Be willing to follow the example of Jesus in this way. Because it is God's will.

This is God's will that his people suffer on this earth for his sake.

To showcase the gospel of glory. That we had a suffering savior who was willing to give his life on a cross.

The most shameful death a human being could encounter in that day and time. He died as a criminal. Held a law for the world to see.

[3 : 44] King of the Jews. And it was one big mock. That's how our Lord died. Willingly. While we were helpless. Christ died for.

Us the ungodly. The people that will slander you. That will mock you. That will spit on you. That will malign you. That will falsely accuse you.

These are the very people that Jesus wants to reach with the hope of eternity in heaven. Lest they be captured by Satan for this life. And then be held in hell for all eternity.

So that's what's at stake. That's what's going on in this. Section of scripture that we will be in soon. But not today. Let me go on and read it to you because where we will be has everything to do with this. Submit. Verse 13. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake.

[4 : 45] Now did you hear that in 2nd Corinthians 4 earlier? Everything was for Christ's sake. This is Peter saying the same thing. Submit yourself for the Lord's sake.

To every human institution. Whether to a king as the one in authority. Or to governors as sent by the king. For the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Now notice that in verse 15. Such is the will of God that by doing right according to God's will you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Act as free men and do not use your freedom as covering for evil. But use it as bond slaves of God. Honor all people.

Did you hear that? Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. That is love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Fear God.

[5 : 56] And he ends with this. Honor the king. Servants. Be submissive to your masters with all respect. Not only to those who are good and gentle.

But also to those who are unreasonable. Harsh. For this finds favor. If for the sake of conscience toward God.

A person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience.

There's no credit there. You deserve it. But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure. This finds favor with God.

For you have been called for this purpose. Since Christ also suffered for you. Leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.

[6 : 54] Who committed no sin. Nor was any deceit found in his mouth. And while being reviled. He did not revile in return.

While suffering he uttered no threats. But kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.

So that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. For by his wounds. By his wounds. You were healed.

You were continually straying like sheep. But now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Throughout the remainder of this book. Peter is concerned that we follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. In suffering well.

[7 : 56] Even under an unjust system. That is punishing us or being harsh toward us. We are to suffer under that and bear under that.

For the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the hope that as people see our humble good behavior. It will have an influence or impact on them for the gospel.

What a challenge. Now there's one primary reason. Why that's a challenge for every person in this room. Including me.

Pride. Pride. We just don't like being told what to do. And we don't like injustice.

And we don't like suffering. Do you see how radical that is? Well that's where we're headed. Not today.

[8 : 53] Today I need to help you. Lay some groundwork. For this example that Peter says we have in Jesus. I need to help you see something of your Lord that Peter is referring to.

So if you would turn to the book of Mark. Mark. Chapter 2. We're going to kind of just jump right in. We're going to start in verse 13. Now lots has already happened.

As we come to chapter 2 verse 13. Jesus has began his public ministry. And he's began it with a bang. A lot of things have happened in his public going public.

And we're on the very front end of Jesus going public as it were in his ministry. As he begins to walk around Palestine and Israel.

[9 : 55] And begins to minister outside of Jerusalem. Up into the northern environs around the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum. This is where we find Jesus now.

So chapter 2 beginning in verse 13. And Jesus went out again by the seashore. Now that's the Sea of Galilee. So it's not really a sea is it? It's a giant lake.

He went out again by the seashore. And all the people were coming to him. And he was teaching them. As he passed by. That is he's.

Now get the picture. He's walking on the seashore. Along the Sea of Galilee. All the tradesmen are doing their thing. Lots and lots of people are thronging to Jesus. The fishermen are there.

And notice what happens. As he passed by. Jesus saw Levi. The son of Alphaeus. Sitting in the tax booth. And he said to him.

[10:50] Follow me. And so Levi got up. And followed Jesus. Verse 15. And it happened that he was reclining at the table in his house.

And many tax collectors and sinners. Were dining with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many of them. And they were following Jesus.

When the scribes of the Pharisees. This is when the music would go boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And be all melodramatic. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors.

They said to his disciples. Why is he eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners? They're incredulous. They can't believe that a rabbi of his distinction would be doing something like this. Hearing this, Jesus said to them. It is not those who are healthy who need a physician. But those who are sick. And then this. Thank God. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.

[11:52] Now aren't you glad? Amen. Amen. My friends. Satan's greatest aim. Is to rob God of glory.

And he will do that in your life to get at God. He wants to deny God his worship. Worship that you owe God in your life.

So all of Satan's aims are about denying God his glory which is due him on this earth. Sin separates us from the goodness and the glory of our creator.

That's why Adam and Eve went and hid after they sinned. That's what sin does. Sin drives us away from God. Our creator.

Our savior. Our hope. Our life. Our joy. That's why people who live in constant sin running from one thing to another to give them what they can never have. Never find what they want.

[12:53] They can only find it in him. Sin separates us from the goodness of our creator. The greatest tragedy in human sinfulness is that it perverts and it prevents the goodness and glory of God from being seen and experienced through his creation.

I want you to look at this again. This is from what we read in our call to worship. The God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Now, folks, that's why it takes a sovereign God to rescue sinners because they are captivated, captured by, held, imprisoned by this spiritual force that is blinding their spiritual eyes to who they really need and to what their situation really is.

People find all kinds of reasons to make excuses about why their lives fall apart or why there's evil or suffering in the world. And then they find all kinds of ways to cope with it, always missing the mark of what the scripture defines as the major issue.

They're spiritually blind. They can't see. And so they miss Christ in the process, who is the hope of glory.

[14:22] Sin robs humanity of a clear view of the goodness of being human. Of being made in the image of God.

Sin does this precisely because sin robs humanity of a clear view of its creator, who is blessed forever.

Paul said, amen. Let me give you a quick example of what I'm talking about. Consider God's wise, God's good design in making us male and female.

And I chose this because right now we're in this terrible dilemma of people not even knowing whether they're male or female. We have this increasing number of people jumping on this fad bandwagon.

It'll pass. But until it passes, my goodness, what destruction it's doing in people's life. We just we just Suzanne just read me a story the other day. We were watching this movie and there was this beautiful young girl.

[15:28] Just she just looks so kid. Right. Right. And and Suzanne said, Jeff, that's the that's the girl I told you about that just had herself changed into a man.

And because of the children in the room, I won't go into the details of how that happened. But adults, you you think she went from being a girl to being made into a boy. And she anatomically pursued that irreversible.

This beautiful young girl. Now, folks, that's that. Because if she could see the glory of Jesus Christ and the hope of who Christ is and what Christ offers her.

She would value Christ above all things. And that would be enough for her instead of chasing this falsehood and chasing this lie that would cause her to mutilate herself.

You know, when all of that said and done, it's not going to solve her problems. It's not going to change her inner person. She can have all the operations she wants and she'll never be made into the person that Jesus can make her into.

[16 : 45] Right. This is what we're facing. So I want to I want to share this with you. Consider God's counsel, consider his wise design in making us male and female in August.

In August, this was probably five years ago. In response to a growing popularity of the homosexual and transgender surge in society.

Now, keep in mind what I'm about to share with you is five years old. This August. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in conjunction with the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission published the Nashville Statement.

It's a Christian declaration regarding a biblical view of human sexuality. It's a wonderful document that expresses biblical truth.

Now, what I want to do is just read you the preamble, just the preamble of this document, because it characterizes what we will see in our passage this morning.

[17 : 50] So follow along with me as I read this. Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the 20th, 21st century find themselves living in a period of historic transition.

As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. You see that, don't you? By and large, the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God's design for human life.

Many deny that God created human beings for his glory and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female.

It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God's beautiful plan, but is rather an expression of an individual's autonomous preferences.

The pathway to full and lasting joy through God's good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of short-sighted alternatives.

[18 : 56] I would say blind alternatives that sooner or later ruin human life and dishonor God. This secular spirit, this secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church.

Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage and then blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life?

Will she maintain her clear counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin? We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it, particularly as male and female.

Christian scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad-hearted thanksgiving, heartfelt praise and total allegiance.

This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself.

[20 : 24] We cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity as male and female persons is given by God.

Did you hear that, folks? Our true identity as male and female persons is given. It's a gift. It is not only foolish but hopeless to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God's design for his creation and his way of salvation served to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good.

God's good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure.

He is for us, not against us. That's the preamble to the Nashville statement. Did you hear 1 Peter in that? You'll hear Mark in that.

[21 : 33] You'll hear all throughout Scripture in that. The issue at hand is that Jesus restores what sin has robbed us of.

What is it? Relationship with God and wholeness of life. That's what sin takes away. That's what God brings to us in Christ.

Our passage highlights relationship with Jesus over man-centered, man-made religion or man-made constructs, ideologies that wage war against the truth of God and the liberation of the soul.

Only Jesus Christ's blood can rescue the human soul. Only Christ's blood can wash away our sin and enter us into God's presence as holy people before a holy God.

That is our hope. That's our message. He is our life. He is our life. The religious leaders of our passage were bound up in self-made religion, blinding them to the fact that God's design for his creation and his way of salvation served to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good.

[23 : 05] As the statement said. This blindness, folks, is another way of talking about a spiritual reality that grips humanity.

We are spiritually blind. So we are without sight. So it isn't any wonder then that the Bible depicts this in a way where we're groping.

Human beings, as spiritually blind people, are just groping in the dark, trying to find their way. They grab something and they feel it. And maybe this will bring me some stability.

And they hold on and hold on only to find out that it sinks. It fades away. It doesn't have any substance. And so now they're left in that condition again.

Maybe even more distraught. More fearful. So they reach spiritual. The Bible also depicts this human issue as spiritual death.

[24 : 10] Spiritual blindness means to be without sight. Spiritual death means to be without life. This is why we need a sovereign God to do a miracle that only he can do.

We cannot find God in our groping. We are helpless. We cannot find God in our death. We're a corpse.

Corpses don't do. We're spiritually dead and spiritually blind. Now, why do I make such an issue of that? Because we need to see the seriousness of our condition in order to understand the miracle of God's grace and the wonder of God's love to deliver us in that condition into his light and life and sight.

This is why we have these examples in scripture where blind people, physically blind people come to their sight and they just go crazy over Christ.

They can't get over the fact that once I did not see and now I see. That's what the man said. That's all I know to tell you. I did not see and this man came to me and now I see.

[25 : 29] Lazarus, I once was dead and cold and in the grave and this man called me out of death and gave me life.

This man. This man. How could we ever get over Jesus? When you see yourself the way that God has seen you before Jesus, you understand and embrace the miracle of God's love to bring you from death to life, from blindness to sight, from darkness to light.

In Christ. And that's why Paul and Peter. That's why Mark is all concerned with for Jesus sake.

For Jesus sake. That's what we're called to live to. That's who we're called to live for. My friends, listen. Jesus seeks the lost.

Jesus seeks us. For relationship with himself. And this is true religion.

[26 : 49] Jesus seeks. It's why we sing amazing grace. It's why we sing the wonderful hymns of our faith that speak to the glories of God in the miracle of salvation to sinners.

Jesus seeks us because we're lost. Jesus seeks us. Well. What happens then in our passage?

The first thing I'd like for you to see is how Jesus does this seeking and this ministering with a relationship with multitudes.

A relationship with multitudes. This is verse 13 in Mark chapter 2. And Jesus went out again by the seashore, and all the people were coming to him, and he was teaching them.

All the people were coming to him. Here's the issue. We can move through this rather quickly on verse 13. The open land that Jesus went out of the city into, the open space, he did that because it allowed for large numbers of people to gather around him and hear his teaching.

[28 : 07] So obviously there weren't any great halls or anything like that for Jesus to go to and stand up there in his Armini suit or whatever it is, I don't know all, you know, with his little thing on and walk around and tell everybody how awesome he is and how wise.

That's not Christ. So Christ goes out into the side of the seashore into the open land where he can teach the people, where lots of people can gather around and hear him. Very practical.

But this is the concern of our Lord that this happens. He wanted the people to hear his message that the kingdom of God is now with you.

It's walking around in front of you. Right? Repent and believe in the gospel. That's how this all kicked off and got started in Jesus' public ministry.

I'm all about the kingdom of God and calling you to repent and believe in the gospel. Now, the language of the text suggests that group after group of people continue to arrive in the area to seek Jesus for instruction.

[29 : 18] So Jesus, here's the thing, he took time for the multitudes. He ministered among the common people. He taught them in the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge.

But Jesus won't allow anyone to be lost in the crowd. Thank the Lord. Jesus shows his love and care for each person he calls to himself.

He knows the hair on your head. He knows who you are. He made you. This is personal. Maybe that's what we ought to put on a big banner out there, Greg. Somewhere across the thing so everybody out there driving can see it.

Come in here because this is personal. And we want to tell you why and how. Well, that's exactly where Mark takes us next.

He wants us to see the wonder of this Savior who not only takes time for the multitudes and the common rabble of society, but he takes time for an individual person and looks at him and calls him out just like he does with each of you.

[30 : 27] And so the next thing I want you to see from verse 14, a relationship with one man. As Jesus passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax booth.

Ugh! Boo hiss. And he said to him, Follow me. And he got up and followed him. For Jesus to even speak to this man, anything, even a hello, would have been disaster in the sight of the religious leaders and other Orthodox Jews.

Don't even acknowledge this guy's presence. Not only does Jesus speak to him, but he invites him to become one of his disciples. Right on the spot, in front of everybody.

Now why is this such a big deal? Well, still surrounded and smothered by the demanding crowds, Jesus nonetheless sets his eyes on this one man and called to him. He singles out, of all people, Levi.

In a world just so full of busyness, loneliness, a sense of disconnectedness, Jesus shows us the true way of true caring.

[31 : 39] Jesus isn't too busy to single out a human being. Do you hear that? So much for us being so busy.

I'm just too busy. Well, we just need to get a little more unbusy or at least busy with the things that matter to God. I would think. I am a preacher. I can say things like that.

So here's Jesus showing the way of true caring. He shows us the value that he places on each person and how we can follow him in demonstrating that same value on relationship.

Relationship. Now listen to this. Jesus' calling of Levi is made even more remarkable when we reflect on who Levi was to his neighbors.

Who did people know this guy to be? He was Levi, the hated tax man. If you work for the IRS, this is not about you.

[32 : 43] Why was he hated? Why was Levi hated? Levi, the extortionist. Low life Levi.

Extort means to obtain by threats, violence, or injustice. This man made his living by threats, violence, and injustice.

And he made it by sucking the life out of his own people. Levi, the traitor. He was a Jew sold out to Rome for money.

Levi bought a tax franchise from Rome, much the same way that people today buy fast food franchises. So Levi used his tax franchise to bleed his fellow Jews for large sums of money.

Rome got what was due them, and Levi took all the rest. It was a really wicked, wicked way to make a living, but it was also very, very profitable.

[33 : 58] These were wealthy people. His fellow Jews saw him as nothing more than a hired, bought-off thug for the hated Roman Empire.

Levi, then, was the enemy. He is the enemy of all true Jews because he supported the enemy that had subdued and enslaved Israel.

And so now we come to the moment where the Lord Jesus Christ is walking along in this space. He locks eyes with this hated extortionist, this traitor of the Jewish nation, and he looks at him and says, follow me.

And the text says, he rose and followed Jesus. Wouldn't you love to read between the lines or be there and say, what in the world?

Right? This is a call for Levi to live in self-denial. He's being called to a life that couldn't be more antithetical to what he's been living.

[35 : 01] It's all been about Levi up to this moment. Jesus took a man who was living for himself and in a moment he turned him to live for something way beyond himself.

This is a call to self-denial. This is a call to cross-bearing, personal suffering.

These are all the things that Levi used his money to insulate himself from. You ask me, well, Jeff, did Levi realize all of that at the time?

I'm just going to say, how could he? How could he? Right now, Jesus is the guy. Everybody wants to see Jesus.

Everybody wants to follow Jesus. He's the thing right now. To follow Jesus is cool right now. What happened when they crucified him? Where did everybody go?

[36 : 01] Well, it only took a little less than three years to get there. Just three years of loving everybody, telling the truth, ministering the gospel of hope, doing right, healing people, helping people, constantly giving of himself, going without food, going without sleep, living out in the wilderness.

That's our Lord. And it took less than three years for them to take that man and put him up on a cross and torture him to death. What a bunch of grateful people.

That's this old boy. I need a miracle, don't I? You're going to get through a heart like that. I need a miracle. And I find it in Jesus.

And so did Levi. Where did God find you, friend? Now, you listen to my language. You didn't find God. Where did God find you? Where did God find you?

Think about your salvation. Where were you? What kind of life did you live? What did you understand about what it meant to follow Jesus when you trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins?

[37 : 18] How much did you know? Heard a sermon recently. I don't remember who turned me on to it. Alistair Begg. It's an example of what Jesus does.

He said, the man who was crucified with Jesus showed up at the gates of heaven and Peter came out and confronted him and said, why should we let you in here?

And the guy kind of stammered around and he said, well, tell me this. Explain justification by faith to me. And the guy said, yeah, I don't know what that is. This is the guy that was crucified with the Lord.

Okay, well, explain repentance to me. I don't know that I know what that is either. Well, can you at least help me understand better what you understand about eternity and the things of eternity? Then why should I let you into my heaven? You can't tell me any of that. And the guy said, because the man on the middle cross said that I could come here.

[38 : 40] That's why. Because the man on the middle cross said I could be here. As the man on the middle cross said to you in your heart, come, come, come, come and know me.

I know you. Come and know me. Come and let me love you. Abide with me. Let me bear your burdens.

Let me walk with you. Let me show you the joy of what I made you for. That's Jesus.

That's our Lord. That's who we're called to suffer for. Is he worth it? See, you're going to have to come to terms with that question.

Is Jesus worth your suffering? Because you will suffer to follow him and be faithful. In the people's lives in first Peter, many of them are going to die to follow Christ.

[40 : 00] Peter's one of them. They're going to crucify Peter for following Jesus. That's his crime. They put him on a cross because he wouldn't denounce Christ.

So they killed him. That's it. Peter didn't run off in the hills. And say, we're going to marshal an army. We'll take care of this problem.

He didn't do that. History tells us that when they put him on the cross, he said, put me upside down. I'm not worthy to even die like my savior.

The gospel transforms people and Levi's about to find out what that means. The relationship with one man Jesus said, follow me.

And all he knew to do was follow. So this initial response was simply the beginning of what would be Levi's salvation and his eternal life in Christ.

[41 : 07] He began his walk with the Lord like any of us begin our walk with the Lord by trusting the Lord and listening to the Lord and simply starting to follow. You just have to take the first step.

It was a response of significant commitment on Levi's part. Listen, unlike fishermen, tax collectors could never return to their profession once they'd left it.

There was no going back for Levi. Jesus changed his life forever. I don't think he would ever want to go back. His name, Levi, simply means joined, joined.

He's known throughout the rest of the gospel of Mark as Matthew. Exactly when Levi's name changed and who changed it is uncertain, but it was a common practice in those days that when a man changed careers or changed his course in life, he took on a new name to commemorate and mark that event in his life.

So Matthew means gift of God. There you go, Matt. Gift of God. All of our Matthews. Gift of God. It wonderfully describes the man that Levi, the extortionist, the traitor, the robber of people became when Jesus saved him.

[42 : 35] So because of Jesus Christ, Levi became a gift from God to aid and to serve the very people he once robbed and cheated for his own gain.

How about that? Jesus still sees and saves men and women one individual person at a time. Jesus changed his life.

And so what did Matthew do? What did Matthew do in this moment? He threw a party. I like this guy. He threw a party. So that brings us to this relationship with many.

In verse 15. And it happened that he was reclining at the table in his house and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and his disciples for there were many of them and they were following Jesus.

Wow. What a crowd. What a party. This is pretty raucous event. I'm thinking we get a glimpse of Matthew's heart toward Jesus. As he holds this banquet in honor of Christ.

[43 : 48] It's a great response from a heart which was filled with gratitude. And was changed to love other people. So we also see the overflow of Christ's love coming from Matthew's heart toward his friends and his associates.

Isn't that the way it's supposed to be? The miracle of salvation changes us forever and gives us an eternal hope. Why wouldn't we want to tell everybody we know about that miracle and that wonderful change that this awesome man has wrought in my life?

We deal with all kinds of things that keep us from doing that. God's love. So Matthew invites all these people to a party where they can also share in the life and teaching of this wonderful, wonderful man who changed Matthew's life with one call, follow me.

He's hoping that many of his friends that he is associated with will also have this happen in their life. It's such a flip-flop from Levi the extorter to Matthew the exhorter.

That's what God does with us. He takes us from being this and turns us into his followers. More importantly, we see Jesus' own heart for sinners.

[45 : 13] He accepts and apparently approves. This is crazy now. Think about it. Jesus accepts and approves and he's the host of the he's the center of the party.

He's the party. I've never thought about saying it like that. Jesus is the party. That sounds so trivial. But listen to how this works out. This is all about a banquet in his honor.

He's the honored guest. Twice the text tells us in verse 15 that there were many. Did you notice that? Look at the text in verse 15. There were many of these people attending.

Many sinners are being drawn to Jesus and the text in it says and they were following him. Now, how many of these people became followers?

How many of these people became believers beyond the profession but actually possessed faithful trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation? I don't know.

[46 : 12] I don't know. I only know that even his disciples left him in the end as he was being crucified. But that's where verse 15 leaves us.

Look at this with verse 16. A relationship with religion. I could say in there so that I could alliterate better with my M's. A relationship with man-made religion.

Man-made religion. Verse 16. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners. I mean, you've got to ask yourself, what's that all about?

They said to his disciples. See, they're incredulous. They just can't even believe this. Why is he eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners? The issue isn't that he's eating and drinking. It's who he's doing it with. It introduces us to the scribes of the Pharisees. These men became the religious lawyers of their day.

[47 : 09] So what we see in this verse is the face of the religion of men. It's full of pride and misplaced zeal as religious rules are used in two ways.

Number one, to pacify false gods. And number two, to promote man-centered agendas. The Pharisees had determined that the law of God, the Torah, contained 613 commands.

248 of them were positive. 365 were negative. Did you hear this? 613 commands for these people to live by.

That's what they had figured out. Rule keeping. Rule keeping was the hedge, the fence around their religion and their spirituality.

So this promoted religious pride. They took great pride in all of these mechanisms layer by layer by layer that they told the people was there in order to safeguard and protect them in keeping the law of God.

[48 : 29] After all, you don't want to displease the Lord, do you? So, no, we don't. We don't want to displease the Lord. Well, then, you need to trust us in helping you understand how to keep the rules.

All 613 of them. Woo! Now, you guys are looking into the face of a true rebel. In my heart.

I don't know what I'd have done, Derek. If I'd have been a good Jew, maybe I'd have listened to them. But I just read that and think, yeah, you're talking to the...

I ain't... Look, it could be 6. And I ain't... Uh-uh. Pride.

That's pride. It promoted religious pride where they felt themselves living above the uncleanness of the common sinner.

[49 : 35] A sinner was anyone who didn't believe and live like they did. That's not how the Bible defines sin. The Bible defines a sinner as anyone who believes and lives not like Jesus.

You're not comparing yourself to me or Greg or us together. You're comparing yourself to the Lord of glory. They want to say, no.

If you've ever lived in an environment like this, if you've ever been under man-made religion and rule-keeping where you know, you understand how depressing and oppressive this really is.

There's nothing wrong with rules. God made rules, right? After all, we do not call them the Ten Suggestions, do we?

Nope. They're the Ten Commandments. God made rules. We understand that. His rules, though, listen, His rules are designed to promote relationship with Him and among ourselves.

[50 : 45] The issue the Pharisees had with Jesus was that as a rabbi, he was religiously degrading himself and the institution of rabbiism by associating with this rabble, these non-religious, unclean, uncouth sinners.

How dare he? Here's the bottom line. Man-made religion insulates us from God's purpose for religion. In other words, God's religion is one of serving one another in our human need and of serving the Lord from a pure heart.

Look at this. God has told you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

We can't do any of that apart from Christ. Notice in the verse, and what does the Lord require? These aren't my requirements.

Greg and I didn't write all this down and hand it to you and say this is, we're not a cult. We're followers of Christ. And then if you'll just look at verse 17, hearing this, Jesus said to them, it is not those who are healthy who need a physician but those who are sick.

[52 : 10] I didn't come to call the righteous but sinners. Jesus' religion moves him into the mess of the distressed, into the lives of needy sinners.

He acts justly and kindly. He loves others. He lives humbly before God and men. He seeks and ministers justice.

just as physicians have to be among the sick and infirmed to act in their profession as physicians, Jesus, the great physician, has to be among sinners to help and to heal and to make whole the people whose lives have been shattered by sin.

I'm so glad that Jesus found me in my mess and showed me mercy. Jesus healed the leper by reaching out and physically touching him.

And Jesus wasn't himself defiled or diseased. Do you remember that? Jesus reaching out and doing the unthinkable, touching the diseased.

[53 : 20] And yet, he didn't become diseased. Why? Because Jesus overcomes sin and death and destruction. He's the overcomer. What has overcome us and overwhelmed us?

Our Lord and Savior overcomes and overwhelms so that no one can snatch us from his hand.

Angels, the might of this world, the might of the universe, armies, whatever it is.

We are made more than conquerors in him. That's our hope. What a statement.

I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. God came to dwell among us. Right? Emmanuel.

God with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus chose to fellowship in a room filled with defiled sinners because God has a heart for sinners.

God has a saving heart. What Mark highlights here is the beginning of what is and will be the rift.

[54 : 26] It will continue to grow between the Jewish leaders and Jesus over the character of God and true religion. They will fight with Jesus. They will try to mock him and malign him and mistreat him.

They even will plot to murder him. And if it hadn't been for the power of God to preserve Jesus' life over the public ministry that he had they would have murdered him in secret.

Jesus' words and deeds made it clear he didn't come to save the righteous the pure or the holy.

there aren't any people like that according to the Bible.

They have to be made like that by the miracle of God's grace. Jesus came to save the self-righteous who blindly go through religious motions who obstinately cling to their religion choosing to believe all the while that their rules and knowledge insulate them from the filth of sin and give them the right to be in heaven.

How do we know that Jesus came to save people like that? Well, look at Paul and look at Nicodemus. Paul and Nicodemus were very proud proud Pharisees.

[55 : 47] Jesus came to save sinners the poor and the needy. Jesus didn't come to give us rules and religion as our hope for salvation and wholeness of life.

He came to give us Himself. Jesus Christ is the gift. Jesus Christ is the treasure. Peter stood before the prominent Pharisees, scribes, religious leaders, high priests of Israel one day and answered their questions about who had given Peter and John the authority to heal a lame beggar in whose name and authority did they do all of this.

And in Acts chapter 4, I want to end with this because we're in 1 Peter. I want you to see something of what Peter says and does. this is going to help us in the near future.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, whom you crucified, I mean, it's like, Peter, did you have to throw that in there?

Or do you want to make them mad? Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead by this name, this man, stands here before you in good health because he had healed the paralytic there.

[57 : 26] He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men which we must be saved.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

But when they had ordered them to leave the council, they began to confer with one another, saying, What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it.

But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name. And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

This is where we're headed, folks. But Peter and John answered and said to them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge. For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.

[58 : 41] We cannot stop speaking about what we've seen and heard. That's another way of saying we cannot stop talking about the miracle of Jesus living in us. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your goodness and grace that we have in the Lord Jesus and we thank you for the testimony that Mark has shared with us now about the life of your son.

Even as he walked the earth doing good, seeking justice, loving people, mixing it up with sinners like me, giving hope to sinners like me, thank you, Lord, that you found us.

Thank you that in our spiritual blindness and spiritual deadness, you brought us to see the hope of our life in Jesus. You brought us to new life and to new light in Jesus.

How can we make too much of Jesus? And so we are so grateful to you, Lord. In this time of year when spring is happening, when we see flowers budding and blooming, trees budding with new leaves, new growth everywhere, birds singing and laying eggs and all these different wonderful realities, help us to be mindful of the new life and the fresh life that you hold out for us in Christ.

[60 : 16] Help us to be reminded that we are aliens and pilgrims and strangers here. We have been called to a life and a home in heaven. And so while we pilgrim here, help us to be faithful and be ready to suffer for Jesus' sake.

That other people might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. We thank you for this privilege that we have in Christ. May we live faithfully to Him.

In His name we pray. Amen.