

## Remarkable: Jesus the Healer of Souls

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

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Mark 2:15-17

After Jesus' baptism, temptation and calling of His disciples, he began doing two primary things.

A.) **He TAUGHT people.** He taught both crowds and His disciples. His disciples trusted Him (but often struggled to understand). Others showed little curiosity. His opponents refused to trust Him at all.

B.) **He HEALED people.** His healing ministry reinforced his teachings. When he spoke to the paralytic in Mark 2, he asked the religious leaders: "Is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven or to rise up and walk?'" Jesus said/did both. He had words, but He also had works.

Look in Mark 1. John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, Jesus is tempted by the devil and then His public ministry begins with the calling of His first 4 disciples: Simon, Andrew, James & John. Then he casts out demons, He heals "many," He prays, he heals a man with leprosy and chapter 1 ends. Mark 2 begins with the paralytic whose buddies brought him on a mat to the house where Jesus was teaching. They cut a hole in the roof and let their friend down. Jesus healed him. They couldn't heal him. But they brought him to Jesus who could. That's our role: Helping Others Follow Jesus.

Mark 2 continues with Jesus meeting a tax collector, Levi. While at Levi's home for dinner, His opponents derided him for associating with the "bad" people: sinners (the paralytic) + tax collectors (Levi). Jesus said, (2:15-17) Pew Bible #1554 *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'?" 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."* His healing ministry and His teacher were combined.

There are 2 groups of people: Those who admit they are sinners and those who won't. We can't be a Christian unless we first admit we are sinners. As R.C. Sproul said: **"The Christian church is one of the few organizations in the world that requires a public acknowledgement of sin as a condition for membership."** Jesus' trademark was getting followers from the spiritual losers, rejected and

outsiders - the “spiritual underclass” or “underserved.” A tax collector like Levi was the worst of the bunch. Jesus spoke to people like the woman at the well (John 4) who had been married 5 times and was living with someone she wasn’t married to. Mark, who has the “Readers Digest condensed version of the Gospel” (only 16 chapters) leaves out a LOT of information about the call of the disciples. Here’s how Luke tells the story: Luke 5:6-11 ***When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.***

My simple message today has 2 points

1.) **Jesus was the friend of sinners.** The only way He could heal them was to spend time with them. The problem = sinners act like sinners. How did Jesus condemn the sin without condemning the sinner? Jesus didn’t capitulate and say: “It doesn’t matter. We just want you to be happy.” Or Jesus didn’t say it was not a sin. He told the woman caught in adultery: “Go and sin no more.” But Jesus offered more than condemnation and judgment. The ones he did condemn weren’t the “sinners and tax collectors” but were the self-righteous. Why? Because their pride kept them from God. How did Jesus condemn the sin w/o condemning the sinner? Jesus saw people as “people,” not as “sinners,” but as people loved by God. As noted, we are ALL sinners...but we are also ALL LOVED BY GOD, even while we were sinners (Eph. 2:1). Paul understood that the Law was right and good – it could only convict, it couldn’t transform. We need forgiveness, eternal life, and a purpose in life. That’s why we are on a mission to Help Others Find Jesus – He is the only way, truth and life which makes this happen.

Centuries ago in Florence, Italy, there was a great piece of marble which was brought there to be used to make a sculpture of an Old Testament prophet. However, the marble had some imperfections, so the great sculptors of the day refused to use it. So it was just sitting there in the cathedral square, a useless block. But one day, another sculptor saw it and his mind went to work. He had a vision of something great. For two years he worked on it. January 25, 1504 was the day of its unveiling. The great sculptors of the day were there to see it: Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, and Pietro Perugino (Raphael’s mentor). When they

gathered in the room and they dropped the veil – they were astonished. It was a masterpiece! For over 500 years people have agreed that Michelangelo's statue of David is one of the world's greatest works. Even with the flaws in the statue, he saw potential. He saw past the obstacles and seized an opportunity. Michelangelo said he simply chipped away what was not David.

That's why Jesus did. He didn't see a tax collector, **Levi**, he saw a man who needed forgiveness and empowerment for a new life. He saw the potential in someone he could rename "Matthew" and could be one of His 12. In **Simon**, he didn't just see an impulsive and unreliable fisherman, He saw potential. He gave Simon a new name, Peter, and a new mission – don't just catch fish, but catch people for the Kingdom of God. Jesus built His church on what Peter discovered – Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He refocused the hot-headed and ambitious brothers, **James and John**. He reclaimed **Mary** from the world of evil. He was on the lookout for Prodigals, people who'd squandered their lives. Jesus offer of grace was for the Older Brother types, too; the religiously self-satisfied and self-justified. So, he reclaimed and refocused **Saul** while he was on the Road to Damascus. He gave him a new name, too; Paul. Just as the father threw that party for his lost son, Levi throws a dinner celebration because he, too, was once lost but now is found. Jesus saw people as people. "Even on the same hand, all the fingers look different." Not monolithic. Every person had dignity.

2.) **He sent US to do the same.** The early church truly understood this. They were "sent" people. They were all about "HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS." They didn't condone sin, but they didn't condemn people. They were all sinners forgiven by the grace of God and empowered to Help Others Follow Jesus. It's easy to live in a Christian bubble where all our friends are Christians. We need to reach out to those who are lost. He created a movement that spread across the globe primarily through person-to- person interactions. He was "ok" keeping things small and simple: dinner with friends, for example. We don't have to have programs, or Asbury-sanctioned ministries or staff support, etc to sit down to a meal and have a conversation. We don't have to be Martha Stewart to entertain either. How do we do it? We see people as people! We can't be isolated – nor can we be assimilated – we've got to keep our eyes on Jesus and be involved in His Mission. We don't create stumbling blocks for people. Some people need to avoid situations – recovering alcoholics shouldn't go to a bar to witness.

What if we saw each other in their highest ways – as God made them? And saw in every conversation an opportunity to show respect for people.

In his book *The Kingdom of God Is a Party*, Tony Campolo relates an experience he had late one night in Hawaii. Up a side street I found a little place that was still open. I went in, took a seat on one of the stools at the counter. This was a sleazy place that deserves the name, "greasy spoon." As I sat there munching on my donut and sipping my coffee at 3:30 a.m., the door of the diner suddenly swung open and, to my discomfort, in marched 8-9 provocative and boisterous prostitutes. It was a small place. They sat on either side of me. Their talk was loud and crude. I felt completely out of place and was just about to make my getaway when I overheard the woman beside me say, "Tomorrow's my birthday. I'll be 39." Her "friend" responded in a nasty tone, "So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing 'Happy Birthday'?" "Come on," said the woman sitting next to me. "Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to put me down? I was just telling you it was my birthday. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should you give me a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?" I sat and waited until the women left. Then I called over the guy behind the counter, and asked, "Do they come in here every night?" "Yeah!" "The one right next to me, does she come here every night?" "That's Agnes. She comes in here every night." "I heard her say tomorrow is her birthday. Let's do something. Let's throw a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night?" A cute smile slowly crossed his chubby cheeks, and he answered with measured delight, "That's great! I like it! That's a great idea!" Calling to his wife, who did the cooking in the back room, he shouted, "Hey! Come out here! This guy's got a great idea. Tomorrow's Agnes's birthday. This guy wants us to go in with him and throw a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night!" His wife came out of the back room all bright and smiley. She said, "That's wonderful! You know Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind, and nobody does anything nice and kind for her." At 2:30 the next morning, I was back at the diner. I had picked up some crepe-paper decorations at the store and had made a sign out of big pieces of cardboard that read, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" I decorated the diner from one end to the other. I had that diner looking good. The woman who did the cooking must have gotten the word out on the street, because by 3:15 every prostitute in Honolulu was in the place. It was wall-to-wall prostitutes...and me! At 3:30 on the dot, the door of the diner swung open, and in came Agnes and her friend. When they came in we all screamed, "Happy birthday!" Never have I seen a person so flabbergasted...so stunned...so shaken. Her mouth fell open. Her legs seemed to buckle a bit. Her friend grabbed her arm to steady her. As she was led to sit on one of the stools along the counter, we all

sang "Happy Birthday" to her. As we came to the end of our singing with "happy birthday, dear Agnes, happy birthday to you," her eyes moistened. Then, when the birthday cake with all the candles on it was carried out, she lost it and just openly cried.

Agnes looked at the cake. Without taking her eyes off it, she softly said, "Is it all right with you if I keep the cake a little while? Is it all right if we don't eat it right away?" The cook answered: "Sure! It's O.K. Take it home, if you want to." "I live just down the street a couple of doors. I want to take the cake home, okay? I'll be right back!" She got off the stool, picked up the cake, and carrying it like it was the Holy Grail, walked slowly toward the door. As we all just stood there motionless, she left. When the door closed, there was a stunned silence in the place. Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, "What do you say we pray?" Looking back on it now, it seems more than strange for a sociologist to be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. But then it just felt like the right thing to do. I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her.

When I finished, the cook leaned over the counter and with a trace of hostility in his voice, he said, "Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?" In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered, "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning." Harry waited a moment and then almost sneered as he answered, "No you don't. There's no church like that. If there was, I'd join it. I'd join a church like that!" Wouldn't we all? Wouldn't we all like to join a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning? Well, that's the kind of church that Jesus came to create!