

Mark 2 v13-17

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[0 : 00] This evening, I would like us to share on this theme called into fellowship, called into fellowship. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as a minister, each time I am recommending maybe a student who is leaving Cameroon to go study somewhere, the advice I give first is that wherever they go, the first place that they should go to should be the fellowship of the church. Because it is only there that people will embrace you without asking where do you come from? Because they see the glory of God in you. And many of them who have taken that advice seriously, write back to tell me that what I told them came to pass. I am also a testimony of that standing before you. Since I got to Abedin four years ago, I have been fellowshipping from one church to the other. But I found a home in Crown Terrace Methodist

Church and in Bonacord Church. And this is the meaning of fellowship of God's people. People from east, west, north and south meeting in the household of God. And I am also reminded of my experience when I went to study for my masters in Princeton Seminary about ten years ago. And on coming, there was a deacon of the seminary who embraced me. And I didn't know anybody. And that embrace melted away the fear, the anxiety and the worries that were on my heart. To show you the strength that is in Christian fellowship. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the text that we have just read shows that immediately after Jesus healing a paralytic which excited the indignation of some scribes, Jesus decided to have personal quality time beside the sea. The Bible, the Latin Bible says beside the lake. The Revised Standard Version talks of the sea. The important thing is that Jesus decided to walk away to a quiet place beside the sea. I guess it was Jesus' habit to go beside the sea. Such a place afforded many opportunities for rest and reflection. For listening to his inner man.

For the gentle and tumult of the breeze and waves. And also for him to be able to strategize on his calling, his ministry. It proved that to be alone is not to be lonely. Because there beside the sea, a congregation was constituted.

A fellowship was in the making. All the crowd, we are told, gathered about Jesus. And the Greek word translated as crowd means a variety of people. A good mix of people from all walks and stations of life. And the crowd was probably curious and seeking for something from the same. We are told that Jesus taught them. We are told that Jesus taught them. But we are not told what he taught them. The subject of Jesus' teaching, we do not know. Although we are not told the subject of his teaching, we do not need to look far to know what it was.

[5 : 00] Nothing more than the subject of his teaching. We are told that Jesus taught them. Nothing more than the gospel of salvation. It would appear Jesus' quiet time beside the beach was interrupted. But Jesus transformed the interruption into an opportunity to teach just as he transformed the beach into a pulpit.

And if Jesus wasn't. If Jesus wasn't inspiring. And if his message wasn't inspiring. Then the crowd would not have gathered about him.

We don't have gathered about him. We follow people who can inspire us. Who can challenge us. Who can give us something new.

And so the crowd gathered about him. Because they found something precious in Jesus. Even if they were among that crowd, they were curious onlookers or curious seekers. At the end of the day, something must have happened to them.

Without concluding what actually happened, apart from teaching at the beach, Mark shifts away from the crowd beside that beach to Jesus' next stop.

[6 : 33] It is important for us to note that Jesus was always on mission, even as he passed on from there. When we are headed somewhere, we may be so focused that we miss opportunities of doing good.

Of sharing the good news. We may be worried of being interrupted or of interrupting others. But those moments may just be the opportune moments. The kairos that God has planned.

That this is the moment something dramatic will happen to somebody's life because of your presence. Because of an interruption in your calendar.

Mark's account is so vivid that it is difficult to second guess whether Levi was a member of the crowd beside the sea.

Levi, or Matthew as he's called in another gospel, was an important colonial employee.

[7 : 50] Levi, who was busy at tax farming for the Roman Empire. This colonial responsibility made Levi a religious outcast.

A traitor as he collaborated with the colonial authorities in oppressing his fellow Jews. Probably Levi had heard about Jesus before.

And Jesus' teaching appeared to his senses. And he was longing for such an opportunity to come his way. Behold, it came as Jesus passed on and saw Levi, son of Arpheus, sitting at the tax office. And he said to him, follow me. Like the paralytic whom Jesus had healed earlier, Levi rose and followed him.

To rise, my brothers and sisters, is not just a symbolic gesture of honoring a royal ensign.

[9 : 01] But also an expression of trust, of surrender, of submission. In Levi's case, he rose and surrendered to Jesus.

It also means abandoning old positions and old loyalties and taking on a new role.

So Levi could have declined this invitation as we sometimes do when we do not want to respond to invitations. We say in very polite ways, I would really like to, but I'm afraid I'm busy right now.

Or in Levi's case, no, I'm sorry. I'm busy filing tax returns. Brothers and sisters, that wasn't the case with Levi.

His response becomes, for us, a model. And not just for us, but for any other person who is seeking after the truth.

[10 : 09] First, he rises and surrenders to the authority of Jesus Christ. And then, he begins to grow.

He moves from an unbeliever and becomes a believer. And later on, we are told he became a disciple of Jesus. During a worship service in my own, in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, we begin the service with a procession in which we have a cross bearer.

And somebody who also bears the lectern Bible in both hands. And as the cross of Christ is going ahead and the word of God is following, people, the congregation rises as a mark of their own surrender to the authority of Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

And express their eagerness by standing, that they are willing, they are eager to hear a word from God, from his holy word.

And so, by Levi's rising, he submits to the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

[11 : 38] And thereby, abandons his own loyalties. And begins to take up new responsibilities. I have an acronym for what happened to Levi and to us who have surrendered to Jesus.

And that acronym is J-E-S-U-S. Jesus. Jesus. J-J-J-E-Ex-P-E-S-S-S.

Salvation. U-Up-N-S-Surrender. And that acronym actually stands for Just Expect Salvation Upon Surrender.

And the moment Levi surrendered, he was saved. The same has happened to you and to me. The moment we surrendered to Jesus Christ, we were saved. And from there, we begin to depend, we begin to trust in him and he grows us, we begin to become sanctified from one level to another. But it doesn't end there. We continue to learn. We remain eternally disciples of Jesus Christ, his students, sitting at his feet and learning what he has to say to us, how we have to live our lives in community and whether we are alone.

Yes, this surrendering or submitting to a higher authority is a stumbling block to many modern rational thinkers who think that by surrendering to God, they lose their individuality and autonomy. But it is not true. On the contrary, we gain a fellowship. We become stronger when we come under the authority of Jesus Christ. And so Levi was not afraid of losing his baggage to be saved. We too should not be ashamed of losing our baggage in order to be saved.

[14 : 14] Brothers and sisters, when something good happens to you, how do you respond?

Obviously, with joy and with thanksgiving. And this is what Levi did. He expresses gratitude and thanks for what Jesus has done for him. He organized a thanksgiving party and invited his friends

and Jesus and his disciples.

He spreads a long table to celebrate his newfound freedom in Jesus Christ. He spreads a long table, probably longer than the one we had during Christmas at the McPhysons.

And Levi's guests. And Levi's guests were composed of two groups of people. On the one hand, tax collectors and sinners. And on the other hand, Jesus and his disciples.

The Apostle Mark puts these two groups side by side, not to highlight their differences, but to emphasize, I guess, their bond of fellowship in Christ, with God in Christ present as their Lord and sovereign.

He wasn't emphasizing any longer the authority of the Romans, but Christ's Lordship over his life.

[15:59] And so, brothers and sisters, this is a true expression of their new community in Christ, where true communion is privileged.

Levi sets the pattern for the world on how to respond to Jesus' invitation and salvation. By submission and thanksgiving.

While Levi was rejoicing, and while we too may be rejoicing that we are saved, other people may not be happy with our expression of joy and gratitude.

And this is what happened to Levi and his friends. It's important for us to see the reaction of other people.

And it happens that while he was rejoicing, the scribes of the Pharisees expected to see more outward change in Levi's behavior.

[17:18] But that was maybe too quick for them. Just as many people expect too much of us when we affirm faith in Jesus Christ.

And I want to tell you, those who seem to be very critical of our witness, of our affirmation of faith in God, are those who are closest to us.

Our former club members, friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. Our friends, yeah, they are very critical of us.

And so that should not discourage us, but instead should motivate us. And we pray for a more visible transformation inside out, leading to sanctification.

Because Jesus Christ himself said, Let your light so shine before men and women that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[18:29] As a Christian fellowship, transformed by the Spirit of God, we need to let the world see the light that is in us.

Jesus again says, no one lights a candle and puts it under the table. Instead, he puts it on the table so that it can shine and give light to the rest of the home.

And those around. It is unfortunate that the scribes of the Pharisees continue to ascribe to Levi and others who had surrendered to Jesus, the former identity marker of sinners and tax collectors.

Yes, it is true that we have moved on and committed our lives to Christ. But the intruder and the accuser of the brethren would want us to believe that there is no change in us.

There is change. We are a new creation. Behold, the old is gone and the new has come. As Paul affirms in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17.

[19:48] And so the accuser, the devil, will continue to make us to believe that we have not changed. He is called the accuser of our brethren who accuses them day and night before our God.

And some people have been put down and feel downcast because of the lies that they have been made to believe about their new status in Jesus Christ.

And the most dangerous and bruising critics are those closest to us and occasionally those who do not have an inkling about how far we have come, our struggles and our victories.

Brothers and sisters, Levi moved on from an unbeliever to a believer. That was his first call.

He moved from that stage of an unbeliever to a believer. And then from a believer, he moved on to become a disciple. And from there, he moved from being a disciple to an apostle, whose testimony we depend on in the gospel according to Matthew.

[21:15] Sometimes we are so comfortable in our churches. There are people who have been in the church for so long. But they continue to be spiritual babies.

They never move. They never make any progress like we have seen Matthew or Levi progress from one stage to the other.

They continue to remain believers. It is good to believe. But then, also make an effort by the grace of God to deepen your connections in the fellowship of God's people and to increase the

membership through your work and your life.

So we must not believe the devil's lies about our work and progress in Christ. Indeed, let us continue to affirm that as a fellowship, we are a new creation.

The old is gone. The new has come. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17 offers us that scriptural support that we are a new creation.

[22 : 39] And we can sing and rejoice because of the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. Levi's richest gain in oppressing others to grow the economy of Rome was counted loss.

So too, we count as loss and against preceding our salvation made through any corrupt practices as well.

John Calvin, one of the fathers of faith, emphasizes our call into fellowship when he says, and I quote, The sum of the gospel is that God through his son takes away our sins and admits us to fellowship with him so that we, in denying ourselves and our own nature, may live soberly, righteously, and godly.

We may thus conduct ourselves rightly on earth while meditating on the heavenly life. Brothers and sisters, we have seen the benefits of being in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

We have also seen the challenges of remaining in fellowship with Jesus Christ. But above all, let us emphasize those blessings.

[24 : 26] And as we emphasize them, we should also make an effort to let others have a share of those blessings. Because you can't receive the good news and keep it to yourself.

We were told in church this morning about a man who had been looking for bread in Glasgow for a long time, going around and searching because apparently it was maybe a public holiday and the shops there were not yet open.

And finally he stumbled on a piece of bread and bought it and put it under his armpit and was very happy that he has seen what he wanted.

And he wanted to share that good news with somebody. And he stumbled on this minister whom he has never met before and shouted that he has had bread and was so happy.

And the minister didn't understand why this man whom he doesn't know. We'll be talking about a piece of bread, a loaf of bread that he has bought from the shop.

[25 : 53] And so it goes to those of us who have received the good news of Jesus Christ. We shouldn't keep it to ourselves.

We should have that kind of outburst of joy in sharing that good news with other people. So that together we can build a bigger fellowship of God's people.

Amen. Amen. We will sing.

The Psalm 98. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.