

Mark 2:13-22

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[0 : 0 0] the world by storm in 2008 with the release of its first album, Coming to Terms. And trying to explore why this band, this particular band, had risen to such popularity worldwide, one writer concluded this way, The story may seem far-fetched. Some might even say too good to be true, but somewhere between accolades and accusations is honesty. And ironically, this is what Carolina Lyre is all about.

Now a moment of this honesty comes through in their hit single, Show Me What I'm Looking For. And I want you to hear the words of this song, because this is the words that our culture is crying out. And oftentimes, this is the words that we find ourselves crying out with the culture around us. Listen to what they say. Don't let go. I've wanted this far too long. Mistakes become regrets.

I've learned to love abuse. Please show me what I'm looking for. Save me. I'm lost. Oh, Lord, I've been waiting for you. Not Lord, but oh, Lord, I've been waiting for you. For who? I'll pay any cost to save me from being confused.

Wait, I'm wrong. I can't do better than this. I'll pay any cost. Save me from being confused. Show me what I'm looking for. Do you hear the confusion of our culture?

But the honesty is in the fact that this is the song that I sing. And if I was to guess, I would say that on occasion, at least, if not predominantly in your life, this often sounds a lot like the song that you sing. Save me from being confused.

[2 : 1 4] Show me what I'm looking for. The only question is, who are we singing it to? Because often it's a girlfriend or a boyfriend or a boyfriend, a wife, a husband, a colleague, a flatmate. Oftentimes we're singing it to those around us. But the problem is that when we're singing it to them, when we're crying out to the world, in the world, the problem is that all those who we're crying to are likewise crying out themselves. And as they are, they cannot hear or answer our cries.

In our passage tonight, though, the hope is that our cries will find an answer in the person of Jesus Christ. We're going to see that he's the one that we're looking for. He is. He embodies it. Whether we know it or not, and you may be sitting here tonight not knowing that he is the one you are looking for.

He is the answer. We're going to see that he's the one, and we're going to see it not only in the way that he's the one that is the answer that we're looking for, but he's the one that happens to be looking for us. We're going to see it in three ways. We're going to see it first as we see who he came to call. Second, as we see why he calls them, why it's them that he calls. And third, as we see what he does for them, for those that he calls. Three questions answered in our passage.

Who he calls, why he calls them, and what he does for them. First, who does Jesus call? If you were going to categorize the people Jesus goes after, how would you label them? Let's look at verse 13.

It says, he went out again beside the sea. Now the last time, you've got to understand, the last time Jesus was beside the sea was the first time we found him calling individuals to himself to follow him. Then it was the fishermen who he was calling earlier in Mark's gospel, calling them to follow him away from their livelihoods, away from the earthly security of their families. And that scene of the calling that he's already done to the fishermen should be dancing in your mind as we come again once more to Jesus beside the sea. So he went out again beside the sea. And it says, all the crowd was coming to him. And he was teaching them. And it goes on, and he passed by, as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at a tax booth.

[5 : 32] Now it's not as if you should know who this guy is. He hasn't shown up before in Mark's gospel. You don't need to. Most of the crowd wouldn't have known who Levi was either. But you've got to pick up on a few pieces if you're really going to make sense of who this guy became. Back then, people didn't just sit down at tax booths. You might sit down today at a, in some sense, a tax booth with an accountant to figure out what taxes you owe. Because theoretically, you've got a say in some sense. Maybe we have more of a say in America, right? Taxation without representation. This is this is why we threw off the English to begin with. And maybe you'll throw them off again in a year's time. I don't know. But you know, you don't, you wouldn't sit down at a tax booth back then. You didn't sit down to figure out. You walked up to a tax booth. And the guy sitting down was the one who was going to tell you what you owed. What the emperor required of you. And oftentimes, it came with this, with this, this layer on top of it, this, this extra fee that you could never quite understand.

What is this doing here? When you were getting, I don't know, 25, 50 percent more than you were supposed to. And, and this, the guy, whoever was sitting down at this tax booth was pocketing the money. Yeah. The guy sitting down at the tax booth, you, you, you were just looking forward back then to the day when, when emperor and tax collector alike would be thrown out into the streets. And, and, and you would hear the sound of the gnashing of teeth and the weeping of, of, of, well, hopefully the tax collector. That's what you were looking forward to. They weren't liked back then. So this guy sitting down, Levi sitting down behind a tax booth, you have to understand, he's the tax collector.

And nobody likes him. Now on top of this, though, you have to, you have to see something. On top of just being a tax collector, Mark goes out of his way to name this fellow and he calls him Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Now why we know this is important is because in the next chapter, when this guy is named again, he's not called Levi, but Matthew. He's called Matthew, the one who later became associated with, as the author of the gospel of Matthew. And, and you only use two names of a person if you're trying to make a point. So what's the point? Here it is. To call him Matthew wouldn't have said much of anything. He was just another foreigner working for the establishment. But to call him Levi took his being a tax collector and ratcheted it up just about as far as it would go. You see, Levi was the name of one of the tribes of Israel, the Jews of which Jesus was a part. And Levi, unlike any other of the 12 tribes of Israel, was set apart to be a tribe of priests. Now we don't, we don't think much of priests today. But back then as priests, the Levites were supposed to serve the rest of Israel. To look after their interests before God. They were supposed to lead the people in the ways of God and ultimately be a connection, mediators between God and his people. Do you get the picture? So here's Levi, born to be a priest of his people, a protector and a mediator, sitting at a tax booth, working for the enemy and getting rich off of the backs of his people as he swindled them out of a little extra off the top.

This is Levi. To this guy, just like any other person Jesus called by the sea, Jesus says, follow me. And we're told Levi rose and followed him. The story develops beyond just Levi though.

It says in verse 15 that as Jesus reclined at table in Levi's house, he ended up in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. Apparently the call to follow echoed beyond just Levi and his tax booth.

[10:38] And those who heard it and answered it with their feet happened to be other tax collectors and sinners. The ones who Jesus calls are the backstabbers of this world. Those who should have been looking out for others, but were looking out for nobody but themselves. He calls the ones caught up in the pleasures of the world. Who were, as one wrote about Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, that these were the ones in the 1920s living the high life and writing of its emptiness.

In many ways, it's a call to all those who have joined in the honesty of the song written by the Carolina Lyre. Save me, I'm lost. Save me from being confused. Show me what I'm looking for because I haven't found it anywhere else. It's the sinners and the tax collectors that Jesus came to call.

It's you. It's me. If we're honest enough to number ourselves among them, and many of the likes of us follow him. But more than just who he calls, we have to see why he calls them. Why them? Why the sinners and the tax collectors? We see why when some others take issue with it in verse 16. It says something like this, 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? Why does he associate with them? You can't just sit down and eat with people and expect things to be all right. When you eat with people like that, it affects you. You rub shoulders too long and you find that your shoulders begin to stain. Why does he eat, they ask, with tax collectors and sinners? And what you've got to pick up on is who these Pharisees were and the scribes that were following them. First off, they were understood as the creme de la creme of the religious world in

Jesus' day. If there was ever a group that had gotten religion right, it was these guys. There were other groups who tried to be good, but always stopped short for one reason or another of taking morality to its furthest end. But not these guys, not the Pharisees. They were completely sold out to absolute conformity to the moral law. So the second thing you need to pick up on though is when they were in a situation like this, where there were morally questionable figures around, there was absolutely no chance you would find them eating beside them. They were very concerned about keeping their shoulders clean, not rubbing up against such people. So they wouldn't dare get close enough to rub up against anyone of the likes of these tax collectors and sinners.

But the third thing that you have to see is that even though they wouldn't eat with the likes of these, they had no qualms about showing up and making a point about their not eating with the likes of these. Right? Apparently the Pharisees were there. They were at the party. But the Pharisees were the guys who went just so they could shine brighter in the midst of all the filth that surrounded them.

[14:52] What it calls to mind is, have you ever seen one of those teeny bopper movies? Yeah? Yeah? I haven't. But I'll describe them for you. Okay? You have in these movies, right, you have a lot like the Pharisees, this group of maybe popular girls, the popular ones. Okay?

And without fail in these movies that go into the darkest depths of secondary school life, you have this group of popular girls, and they come, and usually the story goes something like this.

They hone in on, they target the one unpopular girl in the school. And what they do is they come up, and they befriend her, and they bring her into their circle. Why? Because it's always the same, right? They bring her in, right? They bring her in so that having her in their circle, they shine brighter.

They feel better about themselves. Do you think this looks a lot like the Pharisees? They show up to the party. I mean, that's pretty audacious. They show up and make a point of not eating with anybody there. Because they're all about making themselves look better.

They're all about establishing their moral superiority to the world around them. And I imagine that this is a pretty sweeping description of any that play morality as the trump card in their life.

[16 : 48] We're not as good, though, as we think we are. And we're nowhere near as good as we make ourselves out to be.

I think that cuts pretty deep. But going to parties with sinners and tax collectors, the backstabbers and the druggies of our world, that serves their purpose of enlarging their superiority complex just as perfectly as it may for us.

Finding ourselves in those situations where we bring in the lowly and we feel much better about ourselves. At least my life's not there.

Something we need to be overly cautious about. The intentions of our heart, the motivation of our heart. When we end up in situations and put ourselves there.

Maybe even rub shoulders with. The lowly of the world. You see, the Pharisees, if there was ever a group of people who thought of themselves as beyond the rest, they were it.

[18 : 12] And their favorite pastime was making sure that everybody knew about it. So verse 16 says, The scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

But when Jesus heard it, you see, they said it loud enough so everybody heard it, or at least so it echoed around the room. When Jesus heard it, he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Why do I call them? Why do I call these?

Why do I go out of my way to dine with the tax collectors and the sinners of the world? Because they need me, and they know it.

You Pharisees, you look great. You look like teeny bopper pop stars. Healthy, strong, clean, in no need of a physician.

[19 : 29] But these, these, they don't have any illusions of popularity. They haven't convinced themselves that they're something that they're not.

And that's why they've heard my call. The only hang-up, Jesus says, for you, you Pharisees, is that you might look great on the outside, but on the inside, but on the inside, you're in as much need of a physician as they are.

You think you're healthy, but you're actually sick. You think you're strong, but you're actually weak.

You think you're clean. You think you're clean. That your shoulders aren't stained because you haven't rubbed them with the commoners of the world.

But you're actually as filthy as the rest. Not just on your shoulders, but time and again, Jesus will go out of his way to point out that you're stained at your heart.

[20 : 42] You're sort of like single men. Now, I don't mean to insult single men in the room, but you're sort of like single men, you Pharisees.

And I was a single man, so I'm saying that this out of experience. You're sort of like single men in that you have nobody around to show you how sick and floppy and out of shape you really are.

You think that you can survive on bread and turkey roll your entire life. Nine pounds and 16 pence a week.

Never go to the doctor. Never know there's anything wrong. You think that's okay because you have nobody around to tell you otherwise.

And you'll go out of your way to surround yourself with other single men, floppy and out of shape and sickly, and you'll compare yourselves to them.

[21 : 55] But what you've got to see is that that just isn't the case. Just because you put yourself in front of this funny house mirror and think that you look pretty good doesn't mean that's how reality is.

Jesus says, I'm a doctor and I've come for the sick. I won't force myself, I won't force your hand, dragging you in for a diagnosis if you're too bullheaded to recognize your own need.

But I am the doctor that came to show you how sick you really are. The tax collectors and the sinners, they hear my call because they know that they're sick.

And the only question is, for us, is do you? Do you hear it? You may have heard it years ago, but do you hear it today?

I would venture to say and think that this is wrapped up in the storyline of what we're given in the Bible.

[23 : 13] We need to understand that just because you heard the call of Christ once and recognized your past need does not mean that you are in a position today to say that you are no longer in need of the gospel of Jesus.

And many of us forget that awfully quick in the day-to-day life. Who he calls, why he calls them.

Thirdly, what he does for them. What does he do for these who have answered his call by following after him?

This is the third and final question our passage answers and we pick up in verse 18. It says, now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

Conveniently, perhaps, but nonetheless, they were fasting so that when they got to the party, they weren't eating anything. Not even over in the back corner by themselves. And people came and said to Jesus, why did John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast?

[24 : 31] Why, when they're fasting, are your disciples feasting? I mean, shouldn't they be doing what the rest of the good religious guys are doing?

Why do they feast while everyone else fasts? Now you've got to understand this. Fasting back then, when you weren't eating, it wasn't supposed to be just another religious rut that you, to crown off your repertoire of spirituality.

It was a sign. Fasting was a sign that pointed beyond itself to something more, something yet to come. It was an act of hope and of anticipation.

When you fasted to a degree, you were displaying in a tangible way that you were living not for the food and the drink of this world, but were living for a world to come, a possibility, a potential that you were hoping for.

You were living for the day God would come back and overthrow the tax collectors and the emperor that they worked for. You were living for the day that God's king would return and take back the throne that was rightfully his.

[25 : 54] Fasting was, at its heart, a matter of hope. And a lot of times, it was a matter that meant the most in the midst of hopelessness. Do you remember in the Lord of the Rings?

I hope you've seen the Lord of the Rings. This is a great piece of life. Do you remember in the Lord of the Rings, though, the final battle against the forces of evil?

If you don't, let me just explain what this battle looked like. There was a character named Aragon, and he gives a speech as he and his army stand before the last gates of evil.

He says this as they stand there and look on in apparent hopelessness. He says, My brothers, a day may come when the courage of men fails and we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day.

An hour of wolves and of shattered shields when the age of men comes crashing down, but it is not this day.

[27 : 11] This day, he says, we fight. And he turns with that and charges at the head of his army into battle against a thousand to one odds.

And this, this is what fasting was supposed to be. At a thousand to one odds against the evil of this world, still, I will charge into battle and put my hope in the Lord and in the return of his king.

Whether this was the motives behind the fasting of the Pharisees isn't the point. They may have been doing it just to get, again, a leg up on everybody else spiritually, but they should have been doing it as an act of hope.

So, so when their followers ask Jesus, why do we fast and your disciples don't, this aspect of fasting for hope is what Jesus answers. Verse 19, and Jesus said to them, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?

No, he says, as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. Fasting wouldn't even make sense. It would dishonor the very wedding that they were attending.

[28 : 37] He says in verse 20, the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast in that day, but not now, not when I'm here.

You see, you ask, why do they fast? And I'm telling you because it's time to feast. Fasting is in hope of a day yet to come, but feasting is for the day that is here.

The wedding that is about to start because the groom has just arrived. Jesus says, you ask, why do they feast instead of fast?

It's because I'm here. They know they're sinners. They know they're tax collectors. They've lived the high life and they've written of its emptiness.

And I have come as a physician that will heal them and the bridegroom that will fulfill their every expectation. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, he says, they cannot fast.

[29 : 48] Still, the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away. On those days, on that day, they will fast. But even this, Jesus says, even when the bridegroom is taken away, this is necessary that I might make them into the bride that they were meant to be.

You see, Jesus knew that there was a day coming when he would be strung up like a criminal to pay the price for sins he never committed. but he knew that this was necessary for him to accomplish his role as God's anointed bridegroom.

He says, you ask about fasting, so let's talk about this wedding feast in terms of wardrobes and wineskins. First, he says, no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment.

If he does, the patch tears away from it and the new from the old and a worse tear is made. See, you try to sew me up with your old notions of what fasting was as if there's still something to hope for outside of me and you do that and you'll end up tearing both.

He says, and no one puts new wine in old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins and the wine is destroyed and so are the skins. You try to fit me into your old frameworks of anticipation and you undo the very thing I came to be, he says.

[31 : 17] If you overlook who I am as if there's something more to come, you end up destroying both me and the frameworks you try to keep. You destroy me by making like I haven't lived up to your expectations and you destroy your hope in another still to come because there is none other besides me.

Do you see that? that's why new wine cannot go in old wineskins. The wineskins of fasting anticipated the coming of a king.

Jesus says, I am here as that king. You cannot fast any longer. Not in the same way. Not anymore. The time for fasting is over, he says, because the time of feasting has begun.

The anticipated one, the bridegroom, the physician, the king has come to mend and marry, to cure and conquer.

this is what he does for those he calls. Three questions.

[32 : 40] Who he calls, why he calls them, and what he does for them. Who he calls, the sinners and the tax collectors, the down and outers, even if they think of themselves as the up and outers.

No matter how long we have sunk, even if you've betrayed the people you were supposed to be protecting in this world, whether turning into a tax collector or turning into a Pharisee, Jesus' call was meant for your ears.

Secondly, why he calls them, because they are the only them that there is. in some way, each of us, in our own right, is numbered with the sinners.

I mean, think about it. Mark calls him Levi, so that we know he was born to be a priest, but that he joined the opposition. Yet look at the Pharisees.

Levi inherited the label of a priest, but these guys had taken it upon themselves to be the protectors of Israel. Yet all you ever see them doing is showing up at the parties of the sinners so that their apparent righteousness might shine brighter.

[34 : 02] Everybody, everybody needs a Savior. You need a Savior. I need my Savior. We're all sick, even if some of us don't want to go to the doctor.

sinners. And that's why Jesus came calling sinners, because it's a category big enough to encompass us all. And lastly, what he does for them.

He comes as the long-awaited bridegroom and opens the doors so that even the ones that don't look all that good are invited in to the feast.

He does it because this bridegroom is eventually taken away and nailed to a cross and laid in the grave for three days. During that time, his disciples fasted again, not knowing what had happened to their Savior.

But we, we know the end of the story. They soon found out, and we know today, that the grave did not hold him. And that because of him, the grave cannot hold us.

[35 : 16] Not physically, not spiritually, not eternally. So the only question left is where do you find yourself? A sinner who has found his Savior, or a Pharisee too proud to admit that you need one?

Thinking you can keep yourself just as healthy as you need to be, just as righteous, just as clean. Reminds me of an old commercial for cholesterol medicine back in the States.

Apparently, you would watch this, and I remember watching this, I think it was right around Super Bowl time, so the highlight of our football life, I don't know, it doesn't do much compared.

But you watched in this cholesterol commercial as a strapping 50-plus year old man, walked along the edge of a pool.

And then in the distance, you saw all the good-looking 50-year-old women turn their heads as he walked by. And as he walked, this very fit, very good-looking man, you saw these words come up across the screen as he prepares to dive in.

[36 : 44] It says push-ups, 75, sit-ups, 100, daily laps, 50. And then he jumps, and at that moment, the last thing to come up across the screen is cholesterol, 258.

And he belly flops, and to the surprise of all his admirers, they are quickly overtaken by a wave on the side of the pool.

The screen blackens, and the words appear, nobody's perfect. You see, nobody's perfect.

You might look real good on the outside so that all of us who know how bad we are on the inside turn our heads and stare as you walk by the edge of the pool.

But the truth is that in the end, if this is who you are, you're bound for a belly flop. Unless the bridegroom shows up and answers the call of your heart, and gives you a real reason to feast, and satisfies the cry of your heart.

[38 : 07] Do you remember the cry of our culture? If he answers it, it changes. You paid the cost, not me. Save me from being confused.

Show me what I'm looking for. It's you, Lord. It's you. We're going to sing to close from Psalm 16.

It's found on page 17 in Sing Psalms. We're going to sing from verse 8 to verse 11.

And it begins with these words, Before me constantly I set the Lord alone, because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown.

Would you stand and sing as we have this image of Jesus, walking again by the sea, calling Levi to his side, calling Pharisees to follow too, even if they never answered.

[39 : 14] Would you stand and sing to our Lord? Amen. Amen. before me constantly I set the Lord alone, because he is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown.

Therefore my heart is glad, my tongue which I will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope a wavering.

For you will not allow my soul in death to stay, nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay.

you have made known to me the path of life divine which shall I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine.

May we echo with the psalmist before me constantly I set the Lord alone, the one who has called us all to find our salvation and satisfaction, our reason for feasting even as we fast anticipating his return.

[42 : 22] May we set before us him. Amen.