

# With Christ, the Restoring Grace of God Is Here

Mark 2:13-17

Halifax: 20 January 2019, 10:30 AM

## Introduction

Today we are continuing our sermon series in Mark's gospel.

- We are currently looking at the wonderful things that we receive by Christ, the Son of God, coming into the world to establish His kingdom for us.
  - So far we have seen how He brought:
    - God's word of authority for us so that we can hear the voice of God,
    - God's authority to cast out demons,
    - God's compassion to heal our diseases,
    - God's agenda that the gospel be proclaimed,
    - God's willingness to cleanse lepers (spiritual and physical)
    - God's authority to forgive sinners (last week).
  - And today we are going to look at how Christ brings God's restoring grace to us.
    - I would venture to say that here we see a greater display of His power than we have seen thus far!

Listen as I read today's text to you from Mark 2:13-17:

- Please pay close attention because what I am reading here is the word of God.

**Mark 2:13-17: Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. <sup>14</sup> As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. <sup>15</sup> Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they**

**followed Him. <sup>16</sup> And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>17</sup> When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."**

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His word.

As you can see from verse 13, Jesus is out walking on the shores of the Sea of Galilee again.

- He loved to get away, out in the open, and commune with His heavenly Father.
  - It is a wonderful thing for all of us to do... to get away from our phones and our computers to pray and meditate on God and His word.
- But as you can see, the crowds have found Him, and He is doing what He always does when they come—He is teaching them.
  - You will remember that preaching the gospel of the kingdom and of repentance is the thing that He says He must do...
  - Soon He will multiply His efforts by sending out His twelve disciples and then even more by sending out the seventy.

- We do not want to miss this constantly repeated theme that when the crowds are present, Jesus preaches to them. We saw it in Mark 1:38-39 a few weeks ago, and again last week in Mark 2:2.

As we see Jesus going along the shore of the Sea of Galilee,

- we can be sure that Jesus as well as Peter, James, John, and Andrew remember well the day that He called them to follow Him and how they left their nets to be His disciples.
- Surely there were many familiar sights along the shores of Galilee...as one who likes to walk on beaches, I know how quickly you start to see familiar sights.
  - There are the familiar fishing boats, the docks, the shacks, the familiar faces...
  - And as Jesus passes along, there is the customs house—
    - the haunt of the despised tax collectors who keep diligent watch over the fishermen so they can collect taxes on everything they catch... as if Rome owned the fish of the sea!
    - There is the very familiar face of Levi, sitting at the tax office, and there are his companions of the same trade...
      - all men with whom Peter, Andrew, James and John would have had almost daily interaction.
      - Levi knew very well that these four had left their nets and were now in the constant company of Jesus...
        - and we can be pretty sure that he would have heard the preaching of John as well as Jesus on numerous occasions with their familiar proclamation of the kingdom and their call to repent and believe the good news that the kingdom was at hand.
        - In fact, it is likely that he was there when Jesus called Peter and the others because remember, the other gospels tell us how Jesus had given these men such a remarkable catch that day that their nets were breaking and such that Peter came and worshipped at Jesus' feet...
          - Levi and his team would have seen a lot of tax revenue coming in with that catch and if for no other reason would have likely been at hand to help assess the situation.
        - Levi also knew the news-about-town of the many healings that Jesus had done and the casting out of demons; and perhaps the recent claim of Jesus that He had the authority to forgive sins...
          - Sins... something Levi (or Matthew as he was also called) had more than his share of.
- And today, Levi sees Jesus approaching with crowds all around, and he looks up from his customs house—
  - which may have been just a beach shack—like those places down on the Halifax waterfront where you can buy a lunch or rent a tour on a the Bluenose.
  - But rather than passing on by, to Levi's utter astonishment, Jesus stops and fixes His gaze on him—as a tax man he was not used to people looking for him—most people tried to avoid him... it was always he who was looking for them...
    - But Jesus looks at him and says, “Follow Me.”
      - You can see it right there in verse 14.
      - And you can see what Levi does—right then and there—he follows Him.

## I. What a remarkable call!

- Think about it.
- A. It is remarkable that Jesus should call this man, for here is a man who is numbered with tax collectors and sinners.
  1. They were they who had been cut off from the covenant people.
    - There is no one who is without sin, but they were called “sinners” in a much more serious way—
      - They were sinners in the sense that they had rejected the call of God.
      - They were opposed to the LORD as rebels rather than with the LORD as redeemed persons.
      - They were no longer associated with the covenant people.
    - Brothers and sisters, this was worse than being a Gentile who was without hope because they were strangers to the covenants and promises.
      - Tax collectors and sinners were worse because they were not just without God’s promises, but had knowingly rejected them.
      - What blindness! to have the privilege of birth in a covenant family from which so many are excluded and to see no value in it.
        - Truly, it is to be dead in trespasses and sins in the midst of people who have been made alive... to have covenant food and covenant drink and to die of spiritual hunger and thirst.
          - Children of the covenant, see that none of you take such a dreadful path!
          - What hope is there for you if you sit at a full table and starve to death!
          - What is left but a fearful expectation of judgment for you if you despise the very blood of the covenant by which you were sanctified?
  2. The tax collectors (especially) were like Esau who despised his birthright for a mess of pottage—the red stew that he craved.
    - For them the pottage was their tax revenues...
      - All of the Roman tax collectors were such scoundrels that they were excluded by their occupation from the synagogue and from worship with the covenant people.
        - Even Jesus seems to support the universal practice of excluding those who enter this profession because when He speaks of church discipline in Matthew 18, instead of saying that persons who will not repent should be “put out of the church” or “cut off from their people” He says “Let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector...”
      - But being a tax collector was certainly a way to make a lot of money!
        - Rome gave them a quota, and whatever they collected beyond that was theirs to keep.
        - Philo tells of a tax collector that he knew: “Capito is the tax collector for Judea (A.D. 40) and he holds the population in contempt. When he came there he was a poor man, but he has amassed much wealth in various forms by defrauding and embezzling the people.”

- They were, perhaps, some of the most despised people in all the land.
    - They not only had the issue of being a tax collector within a very corrupt system, but also of being traitors to their own people.
  - Those who entered this profession had no use for the covenant promises of God, for the hope of a city whose builder and maker is God, for reconciliation with the true God.
    - They had no delight in the law of the Lord, but rather took delight in amassing riches and power for themselves.
    - They had no love for God's people, but only thought of themselves.
3. And so the remarkable thing is that Jesus should call such a wicked man not only to be saved, but to be one of His twelve disciples!
- a. Perhaps I should say that it is universally understood that Levi is the same as Matthew, one of the twelve apostles and the one who wrote the first gospel and was said to have been a tax collector.
    - Many people had two names, and it is thought that this was the case with him since both Levi and Matthew are called the son of Alphaeus.
  - b. But who but Jesus would call a man like this, straight from his tax office into discipleship!
    - What would it mean for His ministry to have one so despised in the intimate company of His disciples—going about preaching the kingdom?
    - What of His reputation?
  - c. Actually it is brilliant move.
    - What else could display His power to forgive sins than the calling of a wretched apostate tax collector?
    - With Jesus is a fountain of grace and cleansing than can wash away the deepest stains of guilt and defilement.
      - Though your sins be as scarlet, with an atonement like His, they shall be as a white as snow.
      - He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him.
      - A tax collector among the twelve! What a marvellous thing it is.

TRANS> And indeed, that Jesus should ask him to be a disciple is not the only way this call is remarkable...

- B. The call of Levi is also remarkable because Levi responds to the call!
- Who would have every thought it!
1. You see what it says in verse 14 with such beautiful simplicity: **And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.**
    - That is all it says. That's it.
    - Jesus said follow and he followed... just like that.
      - A major life changing decision right then and there.
      - Not that he necessarily only first thought of repenting at this moment...likely he had been thinking much about Jesus and His doctrine.

- Here is the complete, radical transformation of a sinner into a saint...of one excluded from the people of God to one who is now walking with Jesus.
    - a move from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to holiness,
      - from condemnation to full forgiveness,
      - from bondage to Satan to liberty in the Spirit.
2. What we have here is a marvellous display of powerful grace of God!
- a. This man had chosen his way.
    - He was one that appeared to be entirely unreachable...
      - You know the kind.
    - He was caught up in the successful pursuit of riches.
    - He had no interest at all in the things of God.
    - He had decidedly rejected them...
      - He was the kind of man that most of us would never even attempt to share the gospel with.
      - He already knew it all and he had rejected it.
  - b. And this is where we see in the call of Jesus Christ a power that is not of this world!
    - A power to breathe into a sinner the breath of life.
    - A power to create out of nothing life in communion with God.
      - Here is that effectual call that convinces the unconvinced that he is a desperate sinner who must find salvation or perish—the jaws of death and condemnation close in on the one who was oblivious to it in the past—who was indifferent about the eternal flames of hell and about his wretched shameful condition before God.
      - Here is the effectual call that enlightens a formerly blind sinner in the knowledge of Christ—so that he sees that here and here only is the salvation that he needs. In this cross alone is an atonement for sin. In this righteousness alone is the righteousness that he *must* have. In this wonderful person, the second person of the Trinity, is everlasting righteousness and everlasting life. Here is the bread of life, the rock of safety, the way, the truth, and the life that alone brings us to the Father.
      - And here in Jesus' effectual call is the renewal of a heretofore desperately stubborn will... a carnal mind that could not submit to the law of God that is now eager to embrace His ways, that delights in the law of God and the call to communion with God. Here is the powerful call that takes away the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh that responds to God; a rebellious spirit replaced by a spirit of grace and supplication that calls upon the name of the LORD.
3. The truth is, what we see in such bold lines in Levi is what has transpired in every soul that has come to Jesus.
- a. It doesn't matter if you were born to faithful covenant parents and have been looking to Christ for as far back as you can remember.
    - You owe it all to Jesus Christ and His powerful call that we see in such full colours in Levi.

- If not for that call, you would have rejected it all and would still be in darkness to this day.
- b. Others of you may have known that you were in need for many years and may have sought the Lord and not been able to find Him until years later...
  - But that does not mean that you were seeking Him of your own goodness because the Bible says that there are none who seek the Lord... not apart from this effectual powerful call of Christ.
    - You sought Him because He was drawing you in a slow way that exposed your inability to see and to respond—it took you so long.
    - He convicted you for a long time, but waited to enlighten you in the knowledge of Christ for many years so that you would delight in the gospel all the more when His call was complete.
- c. Still others of you may have come all at once, the way Matthew did and the way Paul did.
- d. The LORD does it in His own way and in His own time, but nobody comes unless he is drawn.
  - In every case, if you are following Him, all of the all the glory goes to Him for His powerful call through the working of the Holy Spirit.
  - It is only by His powerful grace that we hear Him say, “Follow Me,” and that we arise and follow.
  - Let all praise and thanks be given to Him!
    - What a remarkable call it is.

TRANS> But that is still not all that is remarkable about Levi’s call.

- C. It is also a remarkable call because others are drawn to Christ with him.
- It a contagious call.
  - 1. Levi gives a banquet (a wonderful idea) to introduce his old friends (tax collectors and sinners) to his new Master!
    - And they come—lots of them come.
      - Verse 15 says: **Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many...**
    - Surely Levi told them what the Lord had done for him at this banquet and surely he explained why he was leaving his old life to follow Him.
      - Perhaps he stood and made vows as Zacchaeus, another tax collector, did.
      - It was a time for joy and feasting.
        - That is why whenever we receive a new a member, we always have a public welcome of them and a special meal.
        - Many of you have used this as an opportunity to invite your friends and relations.
          - Although Christ is not physically present with us, they can come to hear Him and meet Him through the preaching of the Word that they might come to Him as their Master.

- And let me say, even if you were converted long ago, invite people to come and learn of your Master anyway.
    - Tell them that you want them to meet the one who means more to you than all the world—to meet the one who has given you life from the dead and given you true hope.
2. You see what happens to Levi’s unsavoury friends, the bad company that he has kept for years.
    - These tax collectors and sinners not only filled the house, but we are told at the end of verse 15, again with the incredible simplicity of Mark, that **there were many, and they followed Him.**
      - They followed Jesus too!
      - They too became His disciples.
      - They too were effectually called so that they saw how empty and vain their own lives were—how they were spiralling down to the eternal pit,
        - but that here was the One who was the source of eternal life!
        - They were able to see that He was the light of the world and to turn from their sin and misery to follow Him.
  3. What glory was brought to God that day in the house of a former tax collector!
    - What praises and what thanksgiving were brought before Him.
    - What joy and happiness filled the house where these tax collectors and sinners were brought together in Christ to no longer be tax collectors and sinners.
      - Truly, the angels in heaven were rejoicing with this house.

TRANS> But there is something as unsavoury as the former lives of these now converted tax collectors and sinners.

## II. A wretched objection is raised in the midst of this joyful banquet.

- It was more inappropriate than the lives these people had lived...
- A. The scribes and the Pharisees (or the scribes of the Pharisees as it may be) raise the objection to Jesus’ disciples.
    - Verse 16 says: **And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”**
  1. Who are these scribes of the Pharisees?
    - They are the same ones who objected when Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic.
    - They were the men who had special training in theology—which is not a bad thing in itself—we are supposed to teach faithful men who will be able to teach others also... that is actually what Jesus was doing with the twelve.
      - But these men were scribes or official teachers of God’s word who were of the Pharisees... a movement in Judaism that began when the Greeks were trying to secularise the Jews in the period between the Old and New Testaments.
        - It was a good and helpful movement in its beginnings, a movement of faithfulness to God.

- But over the years as actual zeal began to weaken, they tried to maintain the zeal by establishing traditions to follow that mark you out as zealous.
    - As with many churches today, the traditions of men were given a place that was equal to the commandments of God—
      - and in fact soon held in even higher esteem than the word of God.
  - They had added requirements to God’s word in an effort to keep people from drifting away, but in doing so they had taken the very life out of the true religion... they had crushed it with human traditions.
    - It is a pattern that Jesus addresses directly—coming up soon in Mark’s gospel, and one that is repeated over and over in church history.
2. So what was their objection to Jesus’ eating with these people?
    - Well they were tax collectors and sinners!
      - They did not care about ceremonial purity.
      - They did not properly wash from ceremonial defilement and were not scrupulous about eating kosher foods.
      - Even the money they spent on the feast was gotten in a wrong way.
        - What was Jesus doing eating with these who were surely ceremonially defiled and did not keep the traditions of the elders?
  3. And of course, it was true that at that time there were food restrictions related to the ceremonies of the temple and there were ceremonies of purification.
    - God had appointed these ceremonies, and Jesus kept them all.
    - But these men had added to the ceremonies that God had appointed in a perverted kind of zeal that, as I said before, gutted true religion.
- B. How do I know that they had taken the life out of the true religion?
- Because they could not rejoice at the conversion of all these tax collectors and sinners.
1. This was a time for feasting!
    - The tax collectors had been purified the way Abraham had been purified and the way every other sinner has been purified...
      - not by religious ceremonies... not even the ones that God had appointed for their help and encouragement—but by faith in Jesus Christ who was here feasting with them.
  2. And these scribes and Pharisees could not see that.
    - They could not see the marvellously transformed lives of these people.
    - They could not see that they had repented of their sin and found life in Jesus.
      - that they who had been in darkness for so long were now alive in Christ, new creations in Him—the old had passed away and the new had come.
- C. If the scribes had really known the LORD they would have rejoiced in the true fountain (as opposed to the ceremonial fountain) that had purified these sinners!
1. They would have known this fountain that had cleansed them from their sins and in which they continued to find cleansing.
    - They would have known the fountain that John spoke of when he said (1 John 1:7-8: **“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one**



**another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”**

- They would have known this wonderful fountain that washes away not only their guilt, but also the corruption that is in their hearts.
  - They would have known the cleansing power of the LORD who baptises us with the Holy Spirit.
2. And that would have made them rejoice to see these sinners cleansed by the same fountain, the same gracious Lord.
- They would have no doubt that these people had been cleansed by something far more powerful than the rituals that only symbolise cleansing to help us visualise what God has done.
  - They would have been delighted to see the power of this cleansing fountain because it was the same fountain that they knew.
    - They would say, “What a great fountain! What a great thing the Lord has done here in saving these people even as He has saved us.”
3. But as it was, they were as blind to the cleansing that these tax collectors and sinners received.
- They were as blind as these tax collectors and sinners had been before they had experienced it.
  - These scribes, trusting in their man-made works of righteousness, did not know what it was to be cleansed by Christ.
  - The fountain of their rituals and traditions was the only one they knew, and these people had not been washed in it and that was as far as they could see.

TRANS> But let’s be clear about this.

- Jesus is not advocating the kind of religion we see a lot of today that denies that these tax collectors and sinners needed to be cleansed.
  - They most certainly did!
  - The grace that Jesus brings to us is not merely a grace that accepts sinners no matter what they may have done... it does do that... but...
    - It is also a grace that transforms their lives so that they repent of their sins and follow Him.
    - It is not just a gospel of forgiveness, but also a gospel of new life in the Spirit.
      - It produces a new life of holiness and godliness.

### **III. From Jesus we have a beautiful answer to the objection of the scribes.**

- A. Jesus explains that it is not those who are well, but those who are sick who need a physician.
- In verse 17, He says: **Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.**
1. Do you see? He is not saying that these tax collectors and sinners were not desperately sick before His grace met them.
- Of course they were.

- They were taking money from widows, they were without mercy, they were lying, they were Sabbath breakers, they were immoral men, they were greedy, they had no regard for God and did not pray to Him or give thanks to Him.
  - They were desperately sick and their lives were entirely unacceptable.
    - They were defiled and unfit for heaven.
2. He was not among them as a facilitator of their sin, but as a physician.
- He had not come to these people because they were so spiritually healthy that He wanted to recruit them as disciples.
  - He had come to them as a doctor to cure them.
  - Make sure you are clear about this!
    - The rejoicing at the banquet was not that Jesus had recognised their worth and had recruited them.
      - It was that He had saved their wretched souls.
      - These are two entirely different things.
        - I heard a famous quarterback testify recently that he did not have to prove anything on the football field because God told him who he was. In other words, God told him that he was good no matter what other people might say.
        - It is the idol of self-worth that is in so many churches today.
      - But the real gospel is that we are guilty sinners who all deserve to go to hell.
        - Jesus does not come to tell us that we are really quite good and have a lot of potential.
        - He comes to tell us that we are wretched sinners and that the only way we can be saved is by the blood of the covenant.
          - Levi did not need to be told that he was really a good person but was the way he was because he had been wounded by the way his dad treated him...
          - Levi knew that he was a desperate sinner.
            - What made him glad was that Jesus came to save sinners, not come to tell sinners that they are actually good people.
            - He loves us, not because we are good, but even though we are sinners.
              - That is what the feasting was about at Levi's house.
3. What the scribes and Pharisees could not see was that Jesus had healed these people from their sin.
- These who had been in bondage to sin had been given repentance.
  - That is what all feasting was about!
- B. Jesus gives another wonderful picture. He says, **“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**
1. Do you see these words?
- Often they are modified by us to say, “I did not come to call the self-righteous, but sinners to repentance,” but that is not what Jesus says.

2. The truth is, there were a lot of people who were already righteous when Jesus came.
  - They had already been cleansed in the fountain of Jesus through faith in God's promises.
    - Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and everyone who had faith like Abraham was also righteous by faith.
    - They already had been cleansed by the LORD who was soon to shed His blood for them to bring His cleansing work into view before all.
      - They had already found repentance and were living in and deepening their repentance, but they had already been made clean by Jesus and been transformed by the Holy Spirit.
      - Why would Jesus call those to repent who had already repented?
        - He rather encourages those who have already come to Him that they have full forgiveness and eternal life through Him.
    - It should be pointed out that the whole Bible makes a distinction between the righteous and the wicked in this way.
      - The Psalms are always making that contrast.
        - The contrast is not between those who are naturally good and those who are naturally bad, but between those who have been cleansed by Christ and those who have not.
        - Between those who have their righteousness in Him and those who have righteousness only in themselves (which is no righteousness at all).
      - The book of 1 John makes this distinction as well...
        - Most of the time when John talks about sin, he is talking about the sin of rejecting Christ, not the sins that we commit though we are in Christ.
          - A lot of people are confused when they read, say, a verse like 1 John 3:9 that says: **Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**
            - John certainly does not mean that once we are born again we never commit another sin.
            - He means that we never sin the sin of rejecting God and His salvation in the blood of the covenant—like the tax collectors and sinners in our text had done.
- So Jesus did not come to call those who had already repented and been made righteous by Him to repent.
3. But these tax collectors and sinners who had rejected the LORD, they were the ones Jesus came to call to repentance.
  - a. And I might add that most of these scribes and Pharisees needed to repent just as much as the tax collectors and sinners.

- The scribes of the Pharisees were in good standing in the church, but they demonstrate again and again that the righteousness they have is not the righteousness of faith.
- They are trusting in their own works to give them life instead of in Christ.
- b. But on this glorious day when Jesus was feasting at Levi's house, Levi and many of his friends had been called by Jesus.
  - He had cleansed them from their sin and made them righteous.
- c. It is important for you to be certain that you have been effectually called by Jesus too.
  - Have you come to Him by faith?
  - Do you see that left to yourself, you are a sinner without hope, but that in Him, you are made righteous?
    - You don't have the life that God requires in yourself.
    - Only He has the life that God requires.
      - When you come, He changes you and gives you repentance, but that does not itself make you clean.
      - What makes you clean is that when you repent, you come to Christ for your righteousness.
        - He has both lived for you the life that God requires of you and died for you the death for sin that God requires of you.
        - His life and His suffering and death is accepted in your place.
      - His call turns your heart to Him so that you cling to Him as the fountain that cleanses you from your sin.
        - The transformation is not one in which you never sin again, but it is one in which you cling to Christ forever and follow Him forever and receive cleansing from sin by His blood forever.

**Conclusion:**

In Mark 2:13-17, we see the powerful gracious call of Christ that brings these apostate tax collectors and sinners, people who had rejected the covenant of their God,

- and brings them to follow Him and to be justified in Him.
- Here are people who are like all of us would be without His call—rejecters of the LORD—now brought near by His grace to be righteous forever by faith.
  - Are you among them?
  - Are you clinging to Jesus for eternal life, or are you on your own?