

Christianity Explored

Jesus—Why Did He Come?

Mark 2:13-17

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Scripture

Today is the third week of a ten-week series of messages based on a book that is titled *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, out of England.

The purpose of this series is to explore Christianity, primarily through the writing of Mark in his book we call *The Gospel of Mark*.

By the way, this series is an excellent opportunity for you to invite friends, family, neighbors and colleagues to attend. If they are interested in learning more about Christianity, they will not be disappointed. So, invite people to join you on Sundays in the coming weeks.

Now, I have asserted that the heart of Christianity is a *person*—Jesus of Nazareth. To that end we are particularly interested in addressing three questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus come?
3. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Last week we looked at the first question: Who is Jesus? Mark asserts that Jesus is “the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). That is, Jesus is God in human form. Moreover, Mark gives five evidences that Jesus is God in human form because he shows us that Jesus has power and authority to teach, heal, calm storms, raise the dead, and (most importantly and significantly) forgive sin.

Today I want to look at the second question: Why did Jesus come? Let us begin by reading Mark 2:13-17:

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as he

¹ The material for this message is from *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2002), 18-29.

passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ 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?” ¹⁷ And 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.” (Mark 2:13-17)

Introduction

Sometimes we experience things in life that give us an uncomfortable dose of reality. Maybe you’ve joined a gym and discovered just how unfit you are; or had a medical check that gave you a jolt; or been told a few home truths by a close friend.

When I was a student at the University of Cape Town I had to pass an exam for a level 1 course at the end of the summer in order to attend the level 2 course that fall. At the start of the summer I had all the books, notes and materials necessary to study for the exam. I remember thinking to myself that I had almost three months to prepare for the exam. During the summer I occasionally spent a few minutes here and there glancing at the material. But, before I knew it, the summer was over and I was back at the University of Cape Town taking the exam. Needless to say, I was horribly unprepared for the exam. I failed the exam. My lack of preparation for the exam was exposed.

Listening to what Jesus has to say about you and me can be extremely uncomfortable because it exposes what we are really like. And, in a way, the title for this sermon could be, “I wish I didn’t have to tell you this!”

Today, I want to address the question: Why did Jesus come? How would you answer that question?

Did Jesus want to bring peace on earth? That's the Jesus of Christmas carols.

Was it to cure disease and end suffering in the world? That's Jesus the great healer.

Did he want to give us a supreme example of how to live? That's Jesus the great teacher.

Or was his aim to reform society? That's Jesus the political activist.

Although there is an element of truth in each of these options, Mark's Gospel doesn't give any of them as Jesus' main aim. According to Mark, the reason Jesus came was to rescue rebels.

Lesson

So, today, I want us to see that the main reason Jesus came was to rescue rebels.

I. Jesus Came to Rescue Rebels

So, first, Jesus came to rescue rebels.

In Mark 2:13-17 there are two groups of people—the good guys and the bad guys.

The bad guys are made up of people like **Levi the son of Alphaeus, many tax collectors and sinners**. Tax collectors were even more hated then than they are today. Not only were they seen as cheating their fellow Jews out of their hard-earned cash, but they were also seen as betraying God's people because they were working for the occupying Roman forces. The **tax collectors and sinners** are all just lumped together, and they're the bad guys.

The good guys are the senior religious figures of the day—the **scribes of the Pharisees**. They looked impeccable—whiter than white, in religious terms.

The question is: Who would you expect Jesus to hang around with? Instinctively we'd expect him to want to be with the good guys, the religious elite.

That is exactly what was in the minds of the scribes of the Pharisees. They were shocked that Jesus was dining with sinners and tax collectors. And so they asked Jesus' disciples, **“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”** (2:16).

And 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” (2:17).

The big shock at this dinner party is who Jesus wants on his guest list. In verse 17 Jesus says, “I’m a doctor and, as a doctor, I’m interested in the sick because the sick know they need me.” It’s obvious, isn’t it, that doctors don’t dish out medicine to the healthy? If a doctor came into your office with his scalpel and pills, you’d say, “Get lost, don’t come around here trying to carve me up. Go and slice up some sick person instead.” So Jesus says here, “If you think you’re righteous, if you think you’re healthy, then you won’t think that you need me. Just as healthy people don’t need doctors, so people who think they are righteous don’t need me.”

“No,” says Jesus here, “I’ve come for sinners. I’ve come for people who realize they are living as rebels in God’s world.”

That’s what a sinner is—someone who knows he has not let God be God. Jesus makes it quite clear here that he is interested in people who realize they’re bad; he’s not interested in people who think they are good.

So, the qualification for coming to Jesus is not, “Are you good?” but, “Are you bad?” You see, Jesus has come for sinners, not the righteous.

So that’s the answer to the question, “Why did Jesus come?” He came to call sinners. “I’ve come,” Jesus says, “on a rescue mission to call rebels back into a relationship with the God who made them, with the God who gives them each breath, and yet who is treated like a footnote in their lives.”

We’ll see how Jesus achieves that rescue next week, but today I want to focus on the assumption that Jesus is making. He is assuming that we are all rebels who need to be rescued, even if we

believe we're righteous. Jesus assumes that you and I need him to rescue us.

II. We Are All Rebels

And that's the second point: we are all rebels.

Jesus is, after all, being a little sarcastic when he calls the scribes of the Pharisees “**righteous**” in verse 17. They are righteous by their own standards, but not by God's. Actually they are totally self-righteous, and just as much in need of rescue as everyone else, even though they don't see it. In fact, as we discover in Mark chapter 3, verse 6, these “righteous” people end up wanting to kill Jesus.

Jesus assumes here that every single human being needs to be rescued. And if that assumption is uncomfortable for you, then we need to expose ourselves to another tough question: What is the world really like? Surely, when we look at the world, we see a mixture of good and evil.

There are lots of things about the world that we love—things that make life worth living. Seeing some things makes us think that this world is a pretty special place. We see a little child leap with delight into his mother's arms. Or a couple strolling along holding hands, lost in each other's company.

But then, the child falls down and starts crying, and we realize that pain is never far behind happiness in our world. Then we see the couple fighting and think of all the marriages that end in divorce.

A history of the twentieth century will tell you that one hundred million people died violently in those one hundred years. That's more than died violently in the previous nineteen centuries put together. It doesn't take much to realize that war and death are never far behind peace and life in our world.

The Bible says that the reason the world is not the way it's supposed to be is because *we* are not the way we're supposed to be.

And yet it still grates against our pride to think that we need

to be rescued. We might concede that some people need to be rescued: the really evil people—the murderers, rapists, the pedophiles—but not us, and certainly not our family and friends. We're basically good people. Oh, to be sure, we have a little fault here, and a little peccadillo there. But we're confident that our good points outweigh the bad—that we are good enough for God.

But we must ask the next tough question: “What are we *really* like?”

Imagine for a moment that this room is a public gallery, and plastered all over the walls is a record of your life. Every day is on the walls: January 31, 2010, January 30, 2010, January 29, 2010, January 28, 2010—every single day of your life. It is a complete and true account not only of everything you've ever said and done, but also of everything of you've ever thought. Even your motives are revealed for everyone to see.

Now I'm sure there would be lots to celebrate on those walls: loving relationships, real achievements, acts of kindness, moments of generosity and selflessness, perhaps a flourishing career.

But there would also be thousands of things that we'd want to keep out of the public gaze. Which bit of the wall would you most want to cover up? Which day? Maybe it's something no-one knows—not even your closest friend or your spouse.

And it is not just the things we've said and done that are a problem. The things we should have done and the people we should have helped are up on the walls as well. Everything is exposed for everyone to see.

Frankly, if my life was on the walls it would be a nightmare. I wouldn't be able to stay in the room, I'd be so ashamed. Could you—if you're being honest?

So what's the problem? Jesus gives us the answer in Mark chapter 7.

The issue in this chapter is what makes someone unclean in God's eyes; what makes someone unacceptable to God. The Pharisees are blaming external things—you are unacceptable because of what you touch, where you go, what you eat. But Jesus says the

problem is much closer to home.

Please turn to Mark chapter 7, and we'll read verses 18-23:

And he [i.e., Jesus] said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, *out of the heart of man*, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (emphasis added).

The problem, says Jesus in verse 21, is our *hearts*. That's what makes us unclean. If we were to trace all of the evil in the world back to its source, the place we'd end up is in the human heart.

Why do we find it hard to do the right thing? Why is it so difficult to keep good relationships good? Why do we hurt the people we love the most? Why can't we automatically love each other? Because we've all got a heart problem.

Out of our hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. Those things are what make us unclean. That's where the fits of rage, jealousy, selfish ambition and envy all come from.

"But," you may be saying to yourself, "I'm not that bad. I know I'm not perfect, but I'm not as bad that."

Well, it gets worse, I'm afraid. Please turn to Mark chapter 12 and we'll read verses 28-30:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and

with all your strength.’”

Since God made us, and sustains us, and gives us every good thing we enjoy, and since he has power and authority over our lives, how should we respond to him? Jesus tells us: our response should be to love him.

And the really scary word here is “all”—love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength. So no part of our lives should be withheld from God. He is to have all of everything.

But actually he’s had all of nothing.

We decide exactly what we will do with our heart, soul, mind and strength. We give our hearts to lots of things, but not to our Creator. We don’t even know his commands, let alone seek to obey them. We develop relationships with others, but we neglect the very relationship for which we were primarily designed.

And instead of loving God, we live as if we are God. If we think about everything up on those walls, the complete record of our lives, that’s true, isn’t it? Each and every one of us is guilty—guilty of rebelling against our loving Creator. And that rebellion is what the Bible calls “sin.”

III. We Are All in Danger

And that leads us to point 3. Because of our sin, we are all in danger.

I’m sure many of you have seen the movie *Titanic*. Most of the passengers are blind to how serious their situation is. They are having the party of their lives. But the shipbuilder who designed the boat knows the truth. He knows that the ship will sink and that there aren’t enough lifeboats. He knows the situation is deadly serious.

And Jesus warns us that our situation is deadly serious because of our sin. He spells this out very clearly in Mark chapter 9, verses 43-47. And it’s not comfortable reading. Listen to Jesus in Mark 9:43-47:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell. . . .

Jesus warns us here that our sin will lead us to hell. If we reject God throughout our lives, then ultimately he will respect that decision—and reject us.

Believe me, I take no pleasure in relating these words of Jesus, just as God takes no pleasure in allowing people to go their own self-destructive way. I hope you can see that the reason Jesus warns us about hell is because he loves us and does not want us to go there.

Rico Tice tells the story of when he visited a friend in Australia. Rico and his friend went to a beach on Botany Bay. It was deserted, the sun was out, and the clear water was completely calm. Rico said that it looked so beautiful that he just had to go for a swim. So he started taking off his shirt. Immediately, his Australian friend asked, “What are you doing, mate?”

Rico told him that he was going into the water for a swim.

“But what about those signs?” asked the Australian friend, pointing to a huge sign behind Rico. It read: *Danger – Sharks. No Swimming.*

Rico looked incredulous. Everything looked so calm and beautiful.

Rico’s friend noticed his puzzled look, and said, “Listen, mate, 200 Australians have been killed over the years. And you have to work out whether those signs are there to save you or to ruin your fun. You’re of age, you decide!” With that his friend walked away, and Rico rather sheepishly put his shirt back on.

The words of Jesus are like a huge warning sign to us. They have been written down in order to protect us. But many people—

understandably—want to dismiss this disturbing concept of hell as a fairy tale. They don't see how serious their sin is. Like the passengers on the *Titanic*, they are blind to the fact that they need to be rescued.

But ask yourself this question: If hell is not a reality, why did Jesus bother coming at all? “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” If sinners don't really need rescuing, why the rescue mission?

According to Jesus, hell is real. We should do anything we can to avoid going to hell. If our foot causes us to sin, we should cut it off. If it's our eye, we should cut it out. Hell is real, and we should do anything we can to avoid it.

But here's our predicament. What's our biggest problem? It is our heart. If our problem was the foot, or the hand, we could cut it off. But we can't cut out our heart.

That, above all else, is why we need Jesus to rescue us. That's why he came. As he said himself, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Conclusion

As much as I did not like to be exposed when I took that exam at the end of summer, I would rather be exposed in a setting like that where I still had a chance to remedy the situation. I was able to retake the course and complete my studies in the required period of time.

That is exactly what Jesus does with us here. He exposes what we are really like so that we can do something about it while there is still time. If there is no danger, we can forget about Jesus, stop listening to sermons about him, and get on with our lives.

But if there is any possibility that we might face punishment from God and spend eternity in hell, then ignoring Jesus would be as foolish as swimming with the sharks. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

O God, Mark said that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he is God in human form. And the reason he came was to rescue rebels. We learn in your Word that we are all rebels, and we are all in great danger of going to hell.

However, Jesus has paid that penalty for our sin. Help us to believe that Jesus is able to rescue us by asking him to pay the penalty for all of our sin.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.