

If I Follow Him, What's In It For Me?

What price would you be willing to pay to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Most of us actually asked an opposite question before we became Christians. We asked, "What's in it for me?" Right?

This evening/morning, Mark answers the second question in chapter 2 of his gospel. His first response is that...

I. We Get Our Sins Forgiven.

[Show image, Paralyzed Man through the roof]

Chapter two begins with this familiar story of a man being lowered through a roof to get him in front of Jesus. They took this drastic step because the house was overflowing with people who wanted to hear or be healed by Jesus.

Jesus' response is unique. Verse 5 says:

When Jesus saw their faith, (Jesus was ALWAYS looking for demonstrations of faith) he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5)

Now, isn't that interesting? Why did Jesus say that? In fact, sitting in the front row are some "legal beagles," religious hound dogs searching for sinners! That's basically what the teachers of the law were. They were constantly looking for sinners, which is what Jesus also was looking for. Only Jesus and the legal beagles had very different reasons why they were searching for sinners. The legal beagles wanted to whack the sinners. Jesus wanted to save the sinners. Look at it! The legal beagles don't say anything, but they're thinking:

"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7)

Now, do you see the prejudice here? There are actually two possible realities in this event. The legal beagles focus on one – Jesus is only a man and, if that is true, then yes, he's blaspheming and taking an action only God can perform: forgiving sin. But there's clearly another option! What if Jesus is, in fact, what the voice from heaven said at His baptism – that He was the very Son of God? Then, He is fully qualified to forgive sin!

Why did Jesus forgive the man's sin in front of the legal beagles? He wanted to prove to them who He was. Verse 8 says "*Immediately*," Mark's favorite word, "*Jesus knew in his spirit*" what they were thinking. And He says to them:

Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? (Mark 2:9)

The point Jesus is trying to make is this, "Which is easier to prove, that his sins are forgiven or that I've healed his physical disability?" Obviously, it's much easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" but it's easier to prove that his physical disability is healed. So, as a demonstration of the fact that He, Jesus, is able to also forgive sins, He heals the man's physical disability right before their eyes. He says:

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. (Mk. 2:10-12a)

Is there anybody here who questions whether Jesus has the "authority" and power to forgive sins? Jesus didn't heal people JUST to reduce their pain. Jesus didn't free people from demonic possession JUST to make their lives easier. Jesus didn't feed over 10,000 people one day JUST to stop their stomachs from growling. He was doing it to prove a much larger point: He and He alone had the authority to forgive their sins and heal their soul sickness! What have you been begging God to do for you? Get you a job? Find you a spouse? Rescue you from that lawsuit? Is He interested in those issues in your life? Yes, He absolutely is. As we said last week, He "feels what you feel." But He is much more interested in something else – your soul sickness!!!

After being on vacation with my family and me, my dad went to see a doctor in 1984 because he was so tired all the time. But the doctor saw something much more important in my dad's symptoms. He saw cancer. My dad just wanted to get medicine so he wasn't so tired. The doctor wanted to get rid of the cancer.

These four men in Mark 2 wanted Jesus to heal their friend's paralysis. Jesus saw a much greater need. He wanted to save his soul from hell. What are you asking Jesus to do for you? Is it possible that the reason He hasn't fixed that yet is because He wants to fix something much more important first? He wants to forgive your sins and save your soul. Are you willing for Him to do that? He won't force it on you. He won't do it unless you come to Him and ask. Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. That's the first and best benefit of becoming a follower of Jesus. Will you receive this miracle today? But Mark shows us a second benefit to being a follower of Jesus...

II. We Get to Participate in Healing Other People's Souls.

We don't do the healing, only Jesus can do that, but we get to participate in the process. In verses 13-17 we read this great story of Jesus healing Matthew's soul and then including him in healing his friend's souls. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell this story. Matthew becomes a follower of Jesus and he then invites all his rowdy friends to a banquet so they too can meet Jesus. Now, tax collectors were not very popular in Jewish society. In fact, they were real outcasts. Why? Because they were Jews who were collecting taxes for the Roman occupiers. Most of us don't have high opinions of IRS agents but at least they're working for our own government. What if they were working for another government? How would you feel about them then?

So, Matthew and his friends were not highly regarded by the Jews. But when Jesus healed Matthew's soul, he quit working for the Romans. You'd think the legal beagles would be happy about that, right? Well, they weren't. They were ticked because all they could see was that Jesus was violating one of their made-up laws: statue 376 of the "Holy Eating and Dining Ordinance," scroll 14, paragraph 3 which (and I quote), "...restricts God-fearing Jewish citizens from eating, drinking or fraternizing with unsavory individuals who have demonstrated disrespectful or dishonoring actions (such as TAX COLLECTING FOR FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS) or disrespectful or dishonoring speech or gestures toward the Temple, its employees,

relatives of employees or former employees, within the past 90 days.” (unquote)
That’s what the legal beagles were upset about.

But Jesus had a very different perspective on Matthew and his friends. All the legal beagles could see was their sin - people who should be arrested and punished. “*Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners.’?*” (Mk. 2:16) But Jesus sees them as people who are ill and in need of a doctor.

...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.” (Mk. 2:17)

How do you think about the people in your life who aren’t yet followers of Jesus? Do you think they should be avoided or invited to dinner? Delanie Michaud has a story to tell of how someone from Valley didn’t avoid her at work but invited her to church. Please listen: [Play video: Delanie2 – 1 minute, 41 sec.]

You know, some people think they can’t do what Cheryl did because they don’t have the “gift of evangelism.” This isn’t about what kind of a spiritual gift you have. This is about what kind of a heart you have. Do you have a heart like a legal beagle or a heart like Jesus? Young or old, introvert or extrovert, you can do this. Do what Matthew did, invite your friends to meet Jesus and you’ll be sharing in the greatest mission on earth, the healing of a human soul. Everyone you invite won’t be healed, but some will. How cool is that?

The third thing we see is a benefit that all followers of Jesus that we can enjoy.

III. An Intimate Friendship with Him.

At the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, Mark tells two stories about Jesus and His behavior on the Sabbath. Once again, the legal beagles are there. Of course, they’re all upset because they believe that Jesus and His disciples are completely dishonoring the Sabbath. So, let’s begin with this: What is the purpose of the Sabbath? In the Ten Commandments, the longest explanation of any of the commands is for the fourth command which reads:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Ex. 20:8)

Then it goes on and on about not working, not you or your children or your servants or your animals, etc. etc. And it refers to the fact that God created the whole universe in six days and rested on the seventh, so we should do the same. The legal beagles interpreted this to mean that the Sabbath was all about God. Keeping it holy meant, “Don’t do anything you would normally do because that will anger God!” So, to be sure that they didn’t anger God, they made lists of things NOT to do and they defined what was and what wasn’t work. So, for example, you could pick grain in a field up to the quantity of the size of a fig. More than that and you were working because you were reaping grain. Or, you could pick one head of wheat kernels to eat it but you had to eat it stock and all because to remove the grains of wheat from the stock was threshing.

Today, it’s the same in ultra-conservative or Hassidic homes. You cannot use a stove on the Sabbath because that is equivalent to “lighting a fire” which is strictly forbidden. But, you can get around this by using an automatic timer that starts and stops the oven because technically you didn’t do any work to cook the food. Do you see where this leads? It’s not about the holiness of God, it’s about the holiness of me!! It’s about honoring me! “I did it! I obeyed the strictest of laws! I am so holy!!!

But Jesus comes along and blows up this monstrosity of legalism. After the Pharisees criticize Him for eating grain from the fields on the Sabbath (something, by the way, that Deut. 23:24-25 specifically says is LAWFUL to do as long as you don't take a sickle to it) He makes this statement:

...The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27-28)

The word "Sabbath" is Aramaic and means to cease, to rest, to interrupt. God first celebrated Sabbath on the seventh day of creation. But what did He cease doing? Did He stop doing everything and sit in a catatonic stupor for 24 hours? No! He stopped creating. And what did He do instead? He rested, He related to those He loved, the other members of the Trinity and, I believe, He enjoyed what He had just created.

Now, we are human, we are not divine. So, Sabbath for us will be slightly different. And Jesus says that Sabbath was created for our benefit, not us for the benefit of the Sabbath! What does that mean? Well, God rested because He enjoyed it. He didn't need the rest! He doesn't need anything! But we DO need the rest. When He commands us not to work, it's for our benefit. We need it!

Secondly, we CAN do some of what God did on the first Sabbath, which was to enjoy those we love and this beautiful creation. We can cease making money and enjoy just hanging out with friends and family.

Lastly, we can enjoy the Creator by worshipping Him. Join with other believers and tell Him we love Him, Listen to Him speak to us through His Word and also, do things that build His Kingdom. Jesus worked on the Sabbath, that's what really made the Pharisees angry. But what kind of work was it? He and His disciples "worked" to eat and enjoy one another's company and they "worked" to heal a man.

The commandment to "remember the Sabbath," which Jesus renamed, "His Day" or "The Lord's Day", that commandment has not been canceled. It's still in force. So, the question is, are you keeping the Lord's Day holy? Keeping it holy doesn't mean you sit in a dark room and stare at the wall. According to Jesus it means: worship, enjoy loved ones and creation and do the work of the Kingdom – helping, healing, feeding, restoring. Is that how you "Remember the Sabbath"?

So, if you follow Jesus, what's in it for you, according to Mark? Your sins will be forgiven (your guilt will be gone), you'll be given the opportunity to participate in the greatest mission on earth – healing sick souls and restoring them to health; and lastly, you'll have one day a week to spend time exclusively with your awesome Savior, your friends and family. I'd like to see somebody come up with a system that can beat those benefits! Let's pray...

Key commentaries for this sermon are:

Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1987)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible: Vol. IV, Matthew through Romans* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983)