

Jesus has authority to cleanse all, even sinners

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that he came, that we might know full forgiveness, that our sins might be as far as east is from the west.

And we pray that as we hear your word, will you help us to grow in our love and trust that we cling to him all the more, and that you'd be growing us by your spirit. For we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. So if you were here this morning, or maybe heard our little interview, or chat to Sarah and I after the service, you might know that Sarah works in a hospital.

And so that means that while often Sarah will see me at work, she'll come on a Sunday, see me at the front, and it's slightly embarrassing, I've actually never seen Sarah at work. Now, before you feel too sorry for me, I'm actually quite glad of the fact I've never seen Sarah at work.

Because, well, Sarah works in a hospital, so if I'm there, well, what does that mean? It means I'm sick. I don't want to see Sarah at work, because I'd rather stay well than be ill.

[1:08] Now, I think that's a mistake. We don't mistake with hospitals, is it? We know who hospitals are for. They're not for the healthy. They're for the sick. But I think the problem is that we can often get confused who church is for.

Maybe you're visiting this evening, or maybe this is a criticism you've heard from friends or family in the past, is that, well, church is just a place where people who want to look more pious, look better than everyone else, people who kind of want to look holier than thou, they gather there on a Sunday to just feel good about themselves, and better than the world around us.

Maybe we've heard that criticism. Maybe we've felt that criticism of the church in the past. And the thing is, I can understand why people might feel like that.

Because often, I think we come to church, and we forget who it's really for. We pat ourselves on the back, thinking, well, the best image to describe a church is like a museum, all these busts of the greatest people that have ever lived, and it's all of our faces on them.

But that is not the image that Jesus uses to describe the church. Not an exhibition to us, but Mark tells us in chapter 2, verse 17, what does Jesus say?

[2:25] Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners. Jesus isn't here for the most respectable and best people he can find.

He's not here for the people who think they are well, who think they are fine, but he's a doctor who has come for the sick. He's come for sinners.

And we're going to see how that cashes out in Jesus' ministry as we look through these three stories that we've just read. We're going to see in them Jesus' heart for the people he is experiencing, his power, and also his focus to forgive sins.

Let's begin looking back in chapter 1, verses 40 to 45, where we see Jesus' heart to cleanse. Now, before we read those verses again, look back at them.

If you know Mark chapter 1 at all, you might know that Jesus has already told us in this chapter why he has come to earth. You can just flick it back a few verses to verse 38, where it says, let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also.

[3:45] For this is why I came out. Or even further back in verse 14, he came preaching about the kingdom of God, calling on us all to repent and believe in him.

In chapter 1, Jesus is clear. His mission, his goal, his focus, is he's gone to the next town to preach the gospel. That's why he's come.

The thing is, Jesus, while he has that focus, he's not cold-hearted to the problems and situations going on around him. Jesus' heart is for those who are suffering, those who are outcasts, those who are struggling.

And we read in this story, Jesus meet a man suffering from leprosy. Now, what does the man suffering from leprosy want? Well, verse 40 tells us, doesn't he?

He says, if you will, you can make me clean. This man's request is so obvious, isn't it? This man just wants his leprosy gone. This illness would have been a huge deal for him.

[4:51] Not only would the condition likely have caused personal suffering, the pain of just any medical condition we have to face, but in the culture he was in, so afraid of it catching on to other people, well, it was like he was in his own kind of personal lockdown.

Now, maybe you can think back to kind of near the end of COVID, when kind of life was maybe starting to kind of get back to normal, but if you tested positive, well, it was 10 days of self-isolation. You looked out the window and everyone was running around, having a great time, going to the coffee shops, but you were locked up indoors still because you've tested positive. Well, this guy, this man suffering from leprosy, it wasn't just 10 days of self-isolation.

This likely would have been a huge, large proportion of his life in a perpetual state of personal lockdown. Unable to engage in the life going on around him, unable to engage in the worship of the nation of Israel, and with very little hope that this disease would be gone any time soon.

And I think we can imagine the desperation he'd have been feeling as he saw Jesus coming down the road, likely having seen the crowd swarming this man, hearing of his fame, hearing of the powerful miracles he's done in other towns, and just desperately hoping that this Jesus would notice him, hoping that Jesus would be able to do something about it.

[6:25] And wonderfully, what happens when he meets Jesus? Well, Jesus speaks, and this man is instantly healed.

And wonderfully, Jesus also touches the man, verse 41. For those around Jesus, actually that would have been the more remarkable thing he did.

People who've been following Jesus would have seen his power to do healings in lots of different places. But Jesus didn't just heal the leper, but he touched and reached out and touched the leper. Something else no one else would have dared to do. Why? Well, because people in the ancient world like us know that what disease spreads, rather than health. Healthy people don't go to the hospital because you can't cough on sick people and make them feel better.

That's ridiculous. No, healthy people don't go to hospital because, well, they're going to pick up all the illnesses in the hospital. Healthy people don't touch the man with leprosy because they don't want to get it.

[7:32] But notice, when Jesus touches the man, well, he's not made unclean. He's not made unwell. But what happens, verse 42? And immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean.

Doesn't that just demonstrate just how different Jesus is? He can speak and heal a man. No doctor can do that. He can heal the most persistent and most untreatable conditions of his time.

And when he touches, well, his cleanliness spreads. He's not tainted by our uncleanness. And his cleanliness spreading is so powerful, verse 44, that he can say to this man, go show yourself to the priest and to fully re-enter the life and worship of Israel.

He can be welcomed back in as if he was just any other bloke. They can forget about the years he was ostracized. You're right back in the heart of the worship and life of the people.

Now that's miraculous enough. But let's just take a moment to see Jesus' heart on display in these verses. Jesus sees a man who is outcast and alone, separated and cut off, uncared for and unloved.

[8:50] He's got all this crowd surrounding him. He could easily have been swept up in the euphoria of the excitement of people. But who's the one person he notices? The outcast. The leper.

The one cast off who is in need of a savior. And that is the same Jesus that knows and loves you. The same Jesus that actually, even when we were cast off, even when we were unloved, even when we have turned against him, actually his heart was for us.

His heart was for the needy. His heart was for those who were outcasts. His heart were those who, the world did not care for them, but he did. And wonderfully, the best thing about Jesus is he doesn't just really care, but he has the power to match it to.

This man with leprosy didn't just need someone to get alongside him, but he needs someone with the power to cleanse him. Now, all of us here, no matter who you are, that is what Jesus is like for you.

I don't know what difficult situations you've gone through in the past. I don't know what kind of barriers you feel to the world around you. I don't know what pain you've gone through, but Jesus knows it. He loves you for it.

[10:07] He's got the power to welcome you back into his people, no matter what we have done. What a loving saviour we've got.

But I think as we read this story, I hope that there's a really good and exciting surprise about Jesus' heart. I think maybe as Christians, there's another big surprise in this story.

I wonder if you noticed it. For whilst this man can go to the priest and become ceremonially clean again, did you notice the surprise of verse 43?

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once and said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone.

Jesus says, don't spread the news. Don't tell anyone. Keep it stum. Keep it to yourself. But hang on, why doesn't Jesus want this man telling everyone what he's done?

[11:08] Surely he'd want this man going from town to town and proclaiming what Jesus has done for him. In fact, isn't that what Christians are famous for doing? Maybe infamous for some people that we just can't stop talking about Jesus.

Why does Jesus say, stop talking about me? Actually, if you were to read through Mark's gospel, you'd see that this comes up a lot. And the issue is, this man does not have the right view of Jesus yet.

If we haven't got our hearts and minds fully around who Jesus is, and if we share a slightly wrong idea, that's going to be unhelpful for his mission. And he knows this man has not got it right because when he disobeys, well, what do we read?

Verse 45. But he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter.

The problem is, once he spreads the news, well, Jesus' ministry is hindered by the crowd. And the problem is that the crowd are expecting a different sort of saviour.

[12:26] To help us get our heads around this, as you mentioned earlier, Sarah and I live in Edinburgh and we don't live that far away from Murrayfield. Now, hopefully lots of us know that Murrayfield is the home of the Scotland rugby team.

But in recent years, well, it's also been the home to some of the biggest pop stars and musicians in the world. Oasis, Taylor Swift, have come to make Murrayfield their home for a few nights. I don't know if Pataudry's been through the same sort of upgrade.

But the thing is, so it means that the same place, well, it can attract two very different crowds. Now, just imagine you've got yourself a ticket to go see Taylor Swift. You've dressed up, you're excited for the night.

Then you sit down and you realize that the Scotland rugby team walks out of the tunnel. Now, Scotland could beat the All Blacks in the most nail-biting, exciting game you've ever seen. You'd still be disappointed.

You didn't want to see Scotland play rugby. You bought a ticket for Taylor Swift. Well, that's exactly what's going on if we share a different sort of Jesus. The crowds might flock, they might gather round, but they've come for the wrong person.

[13:35] It'd be easy, wouldn't it, to go into Aberdeen and tell everyone that Jesus is a great healer. If you've got a medical problem, I know a saviour can sort it out. Now, Jesus does heal. The thing is that that's all we tell people about Jesus.

Well, they'll come for the healing and they'll forget everything else. We could fill the church with people who don't want who Jesus truly is. Maybe we tell people, Jesus is just a wise teacher with great parables.

They come when they've got a problem in life to get some top-up and wisdom, deal with that problem. But when he says something challenging, well, they walk away. Because we've given them the wrong sort of Jesus. We've got a lot of people we've got a lot of people.

We're going to look for someone other than he truly is. Yes, Jesus heals. Yes, Jesus teaches. But Jesus' focus is more than just our temporary well-being.

For as we see in our next few stories as we go through, Jesus' heart isn't just to cleanse, that Jesus' power is to forgive, and his focus is to forgive.

[14:41] And so that's what we see as we turn now to look at our next scene in chapter 2, verses 1 to 12. And we're going to see this contrast between the kind of short-term needs and someone's eternal needs.

For in these verses, Jesus heads back to Capernaum. And again, we see, don't we, that he's swamped by a large crowd. They've gathered in. But this time, verse 2, what's he doing?

Well, he's preaching to them. And we read just how large this crowd is, don't we, continuing in verse 2, that the house is bursting at the seams. People are desperately trying to poke their heads in in each and every way they can, through the window, at the door.

And if you're late, we haven't got a hope of getting in. This place is bond-full. It's ramped. And that's a big issue for these four blokes who arrive a bit late.

Because they're not content to stand on the street and just hope they overhear what Jesus has to say. Because who have they got? Well, they've got a man in a stretcher who can't walk.

[15:49] They want to get right to Jesus' feet so that he might heal their friend. And so what do they do? Well, they come up with a rather inventive solution. Perhaps we know their solution.

If you can't get through the door, well, how else do you get into a building? Well, you go through the ceiling, of course. And so they make a hole in the roof and they lower their friends down. Now, you can imagine the anticipation in the room.

If someone just dropped through the ceiling, I'm sure we'd all turn to look. And I'm sure all the people turn to look and think, Jesus, you're midsermon. What are you going to do?

Paralyzed man has just landed at your feet. What miraculous things is he going to do in this situation? And so the crowd are excited as Jesus turns to the man and verse 5 says, Wait, what? What did Jesus just say? Surely I must have misheard him. Surely he said, get up and walk. Surely he said, you've been healed. Surely he said, you'll be fine, mate. Did he really just say, your sins are forgiven?

[16:59] Jesus, can't you see who you're speaking to? There's a man literally lying on the floor. What does he need? He doesn't need you talking about sins. He needs you to heal him. Come on. Can't you see what's going on?

The thing is that they've missed the bigger issue in the room. And Jesus knows what's really important to this man.

And whilst maybe if you've been in church for any length of time, kind of conversations about forgiveness, and that's what Jesus does, maybe we're quite used to that. That doesn't seem to surprise us.

But actually, this is a really serious deal. For it's one thing to preach repentance, that we're sinners and we need to repent of our sins. It's another to preach that God can save us.

But this is a whole extra level. To be able to claim personal responsibility and authority to forgive those sins.

[18:00] And that significance is not lost on those around Jesus, is it? Verse 6. Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like that?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Now at one level, the scribes are entirely right.

Who can forgive sins except the holy and righteous God who has been offended by them? God must forgive sins. But whilst they've got their heads around God's exclusive right to forgive, they've

completely missed that God was standing in the room with them.

They've witnessed the wondrous gospel of God that Jesus has come to bring forgiveness of sins right before their eyes and they are completely blinded to what's going on.

And while to help them see it, Jesus reveals his power once more. Verse 8 says, It's a good question to get our heads around, isn't it?

[19:35] Which is it easier to say? Okay, your sins are forgiven or get up and walk? Well, practically, it's actually easier for us to say your sins are forgiven.

I could say that to you right now and there's no way to check whether I'm telling the truth or not, is there? It's going to take until judgment day until you find out whether I'm right.

But if you've got a sickness and I say you are healed, well, you're going to find out in the moment whether I actually have that power or not. If I say get up and walk and you don't, well, you immediately know I'm a fraud.

It's easier to say your sins are forgiven. Who can check? And so while Jesus, to prove that he can do the invisible thing, he demonstrates it with the physical thing.

He heals the paralyzed man. verse 10, that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[20:38] Jesus heals so that we'll see he has power and authority to forgive. Does the physical so we will believe the invisible. Now, it's just a quick aside.

Maybe you've heard it said by some that Jesus never claimed to be God. Actually, that wasn't what he was saying, that that's something that other people have put on him. But it's clear here, isn't it, Jesus knows what he's doing.

God alone can forgive sins. The Son of Man has authority to forgive. Jesus truly did claim to be God, to be Emmanuel. Well, the thing is that, well, at that moment, well, the crowd, they start to get it.

For as this paralyzed man gets up and heads home in verse 12, well, all the people, what are they doing? They're amazed. And quite rightly, wouldn't we be amazed to see such a miraculous act happen before our eyes?

But the thing is, it's not the healing that they're amazed by. Verse 12 says, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying we never saw anything like this.

[21:56] They've never seen anything like this. This is a unique moment. The thing is, this crowd have seen miraculous healings before.

Because we're told, where are they? Well, we're told back in verse 1 that they're in Capernaum. Jesus has already been doing healings in Capernaum earlier in chapter 1.

It's even underlined in verse 1 that he was at home. He's surrounded by people who have seen Jesus' miraculous works in the past. They've seen the healings before.

So what is it that they have never seen before? Well, the people have never seen full and free forgiveness on offer before by the Son of Man standing before their eyes.

They've never seen God come down to earth and dwell as a man before and seen it truly. And they've never seen a man who has authority on earth to forgive.

[22:59] And that is the same Jesus that we follow today. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He doesn't just preach about our problem, our need for repentance, but he has come to deal with the problem. He's not just a problems person, but he is a solutions person.

Brutally honest about how serious our sin problem is, but prepared to do anything he needs to to be the perfect solution to our sin.

For whilst it was easier for him to say, your sins are forgiven in that moment, actually the process to make that true was so much harder.

for Jesus had to be born. He had to humble himself, not into a palace, but into a stable. He had to live and grow up in a world of suffering and pain in perfect obedience to the Father.

[24:02] He never broke a single one of God's rules. Always listened to God's word, always delighted in it, no matter the cost. Why? Well, to take the punishment for our sin to the cross.

As we saw this morning, he might be the spotless, perfect lamb who would die for the sins of other people. He bore the wrath of God on sin on the cross so that when he spoke to the paralyzed man, well, it wouldn't just be wishful thinking.

It wouldn't be a hope that maybe God will do it just because Jesus is quite nice, but because so that Jesus would have authority on earth to forgive sins because he died to save sinners.

And wonderfully, that can be true for each and every one of us. No matter the kind of sins and problems we have in our past, no matter how awful we might have been, Jesus is still offering that same forgiveness to you and me.

For that is what we see in our final point, that not only does Jesus have authority to forgive, but actually he has a focus to forgive even the worst of all sinners.

[25:21] We see that as we turn now to verses 13 to 17, and we meet this man called Levi. For in these verses, we notice that, well, Jesus has started to make some rather unlikely friends.

For example, we're told that this man, Levi, what was his job? We're told that he was a tax collector. And a tax collector in that system, well, they were kind of typified as being kind of treacherous and greedy.

For the tax system back in first century Israel, it didn't work like HMRC today. Now, I know that when you get one of those kind of brown envelope letters, it's a bit scary. You worry about the contents.

But actually, the people living under the system that Jesus saw, well, it was much more corrupt. For the Romans used Jewish people to collaborate and to tax their own folk, the Jewish people.

So not only were they collaborators, they were working with the Roman overlords, but as long as the Romans got their fair share, they could take off as much extra as they wanted. They were benefiting from the subjugation of their kinsmen.

[26:37] And so we can imagine how people would have thought about the tax man. It's a bit like maybe if you get one of those kind of spam phone calls that's saying you've got unpaid tax, and you put down the phone because you're wise, you're smart, you realize that's not the real tax man.

But the problem is the army show up the door and say, make sure you pay the scammer. That's a bit like how the tax system worked back then. And so while they were extremely unpopular, the worst of the worst, who could be worse in a collaborating thief.

And Levi is exactly the man Jesus calls to follow him. Verse 14. Exactly the sort of man that Jesus wants to dine with.

Verse 15. He associates with tax collectors and sinners. And it's a reputation that has been going around. Jesus is being known for eating with these sorts of people.

so much so that the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, well, they start to grumble. They start to think, Jesus, if you're such a powerful and wise teacher, if you're one of these greatest rabbis who have ever lived in Israel, why are you spending time with such awful people?

[27:50] Verse 16. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Now, what are they really saying? Well, they're really saying, Jesus, why didn't you come to my house?

If you're so worried about sin, if you're so worried about kind of people offending God, not listening to his rules, well, then why didn't you come dine with us? We're the people in society who are best keeping God's law.

We're the people that are most zealous in our love for God. We're the people that are most in his good books. If you're worried about sin, look nowhere else than us.

But what does Jesus say? Well, as we've already read verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous but sinners. Jesus Christ did not come to call people who thought they were in God's good books.

[28:52] Jesus Christ did not come to call people who thought that God would be really impressed by them because they lived such holy and pious lives. Jesus Christ came to call and save sinners.

For the self-righteous will never repent when the gospel is proclaimed. For them, the gospel is not good news but bad news.

The gospel is a get-out-of-jail-free ticket for everyone else who didn't pull their socks up enough and didn't do as good a job as we did. It's not good news for them. And so their temptation is again to have a half Christ.

Someone who comes for the respectable. Someone who comes to give us a pat on the back to say, good job, God's going to be really impressed with you. But Jesus didn't come to do that.

But actually the full picture we get of Jesus in these verses shows us that if we want to enjoy all his blessings, we can't pretend that we're the healthy just going for that physical, that little extra check-up.

[29:52] But we are the sick in desperate need of a doctor. We're like the man suffering from leprosy who needs miraculous help.

We're like the paralyzed man who has no hope of getting off his bed. And we're like the worst of all sinners that have got no hope of spending eternity with God unless they can find the most amazing Savior.

But wonderfully, those are the people that Jesus has come for. He's come for tax collectors and sinners. He's come for the lowest of the low.

So let me encourage all of us here to put our hope and trust in the real Jesus. Not just a nice healer, not just a good preacher and teacher, but actually the Savior of the least of all sinners.

And if you're here this evening and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, let me urge you this evening to really think about Christ's work, to really think about what he has truly come on to earth to do, to save you from your sins.

[31:11] for one day Jesus will return to this earth to judge the living and the dead in righteousness. And I urge you, before that day comes, put your hope and trust in him for he has authority on earth to forgive all sin, even the worst of sinners.

Let me urge us all to put our hope and trust in him and look forward to that day he returns. for he has not come to call the righteous but sinners. Let's pray.