

Fear Not for He Is Risen

Matthew 28:5-6

The Cleansing of the Leper

Mark 1:40-45

Jesus' Authority to Forgive Sins

Mark 2:1-12

I Came to Call Sinners

Mark 2:13-17

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April 4, 2021—No. 4083

April 25, 2021—No. 4086

We must never forget that the church is a company of saved sinners and that the church is a hospital for those who are sick and dying spiritually. Really, this is what Jesus clarifies in the confrontation here with the scribes and Pharisees. They come and they say, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” Now, it is most likely that this happens, that the disciples are leaving Matthew’s place. And these Jewish leaders see here an opportunity to undermine Jesus’ influence on His disciples. You see here it is very indirect. And, really cowardly. They use their label: sinners. How could Jesus share a meal and fellowship with sinners? They see this as a compromise. How could He be a religious leader and eat with these people?

Look at Jesus’ answer. What does He do? He does not defend these sinners. Nor does He go after these Pharisees for their self-righteous labeling of others. He could have done that. But, instead, He says, “You are right. They are sinners. And I came for sinners. I didn’t come for the righteous. I didn’t come for those who have no need of repentance. But I came as a doctor, not for the whole, but for the sick.” Which doctor goes to college and medical school for more than a decade of education and refuses to help the sick but says, “I did this so I could drive a

sports car and play golf.” What would you say about a doctor like that? And Jesus is saying, “I came as the Great Physician to labor among the sick, to heal them. It is not the healthy, the whole, that need a physician, but the sick. This is why I came.”

There is something in what Jesus said here that is probably even more offensive to the Pharisees and the scribes, but for us very beautiful. It is in those words, “I came.” Jesus is conscious of the fact that He has come from heaven, that He is sent of the Father into the world. And He says, “I came for sinners. I’ve come as a doctor. The hospital is open, the sinners are welcome.” And, of course, that speaks not only of His divinity and His eternal past, but it also looks ahead to the cross on which He would lay down His life, not for the self-righteous, but for sinners, for a Levi, a Zacchaeus, a Mary Magdalene, a Peter. And, in that cross, He does His work for us sinners.

So, we are left with a question in this message: How do you see Jesus? Is it through the eyes of the Pharisees, or are you one of these publicans and sinners?

Sinners. I came to call sinners to repentance. Oh, the mercy of our Savior!

Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 4, 2021
No. 4083

Fear Not for He Is Risen
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

In Matthew 28:5 and 6, we read this: “And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

What are your fears today? Fear is debilitating. When we are afraid, we freeze and we shrink back from what we are called to do in life. Sometimes fear comes because we are suddenly confronted with something that seems threatening. Other times fear comes because of a memory or an imagination that we have that makes us afraid.

Are you fearful because of your sin? Does your sin make you want to hide from God, from the judgment of God? Are you fearful because of the power of sin, and are you afraid that it may overcome you? Or is it, perhaps, the future that makes you afraid. Tomorrow is unknown, the future is unpredictable, there are dark roads ahead—will you be able to have the strength to persevere? Or maybe it is the fear of something in your past, something terrible that has happened to you, and

the thought of it or the memory of it or the thought of it happening again makes you shudder. Or, there may be relational fears—the fear of being alone or the fear of losing a loved one that you have. Perhaps it is your responsibilities that make you afraid. Will you ever have the strength to go on and to get through what lies before you in life?

Fear not ye, Jesus is risen. That is the word of the angel in our text today.

On the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, a group of five or so women came to Jesus’ tomb. And the message that the angel met them with was, “Fear not.”

Who were these women, and what were their fears? Throughout His ministry, these were the women who had been very close to Jesus and followed Him and His disciples and ministered to His daily needs. Among them was Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast demons, and also Jesus’ mother, and His aunt, and other close relatives.

Just a few days earlier, these women had witnessed the trial of their beloved Savior and Friend. They heard Him condemned to death. When He

was led away to be crucified, they followed at a distance, and they stood afar off listening while the hammers pounded the nails through their Master's hands and feet. They listened to the voice of the mocking crowds. They heard the cries of Jesus from the cross. Through the three hours of darkness, they lingered. Then they watched as the soldiers came to break the legs of those who had been crucified. Shortly after this, they witnessed Nicodemus and Joseph taking down the body of Jesus and they followed to see where Jesus was laid. That was Friday afternoon.

Saturday was the Sabbath, so they stayed home.

Now it is early Sunday morning, dawn, as the day is breaking. They come to finish the work of burying their Savior, and they bring with them spices that they will use to anoint the body of their beloved Lord.

What is it that moves them to come, and to come so soon? Certainly it is love; they loved this One. You saw this in the anointing of Jesus' feet just a week prior to this by one of these women. Simon the prophet had said to Jesus' mother: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." This is the experience of the love of these women. So they could not sit around. They were moved with love to take this initiative and to go out and

complete the burial of the Lord.

Yet, what courage they had. That is explained by their faith. A Roman guard was at the tomb. A stone was in front of the mouth of the tomb. Yet, here they go with courage and commitment. That is because of their faith in the One who had died. Yes, they were confused and their faith was weak, but how they loved and trusted in this One!

We can understand a little bit of how they felt and what they experienced at this time, how sad they must have been. The One who had died was not just a close friend, but this was their leader, this was the One in whom they had put their hopes. How confused they must have felt. Later in this day, the two travelers on the road to Emmaus would express their confusion to Jesus Himself, and these women must have had the same confusion. How fearful they must have been about some things. What now will happen to the followers of Jesus? They put *Him* to death, what will they do to *us*?

And now the earth trembled and there was an angel present. This was not the same kind of fear that the keepers had and because of which they became as dead men. Yet, this added to their confusion and their fear. What a mixture of emotions they must have had this morning. Then we see them come to the

is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." Did you catch that? He is saying that, as Christians, there is a responsibility towards a brother who sins, which includes a change in your relationship to him so that you do not hang out with him anymore as though his sin is OK. But, when it comes to unbelievers in the world, these people are in need of the gospel. And you are not taken out of the world, but you are left in the world to be there for the spiritually sick and needy. And that includes using hospitality as a means of giving witness to them—not just to hang out as friends, but to bring them into living contact with Jesus Christ in your home and through their contact with you.

Really, this is about understanding sin and living in humility. And the Pharisees were wrong on both counts. They viewed sin not as a heart issue or a personal issue, but in a very external way. In their thinking, sin is in the deed. If you could look all polished and clean on the outside, if no one else could point at your murder or adultery, then you were righteous. And taking this view of sin, you had to stay away from anyone and everyone that might be defiled by acts of sin.

So, you have Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. What did the Levite and the priest do when they came down the road and saw this beaten man? Well, they thought to themselves, "This guy has been involved in some bad business." So they crossed the street, they walked past him at a distance so as to avoid becoming defiled. They refused to acknowledge that they themselves were already and personally defiled with sin. And the real problem was not just their view of sin but their view of themselves. There was no humility. They saw themselves as righteous. They were the ninety-nine who needed no repentance, or the older brother who refused to rejoice at the return of the prodigal.

We should be warned here. Every believer or church that holds to doctrinal and moral convictions runs the risk of becoming Pharisaical in perspective and practice. And of justifying isolation with a desire to be holy. The danger is that the church or individual becomes so smug and self-assured that the message that is conveyed to the unbelieving world is no longer a message that salvation is barred to the self-righteous but the way is open to sinners who know their need, but instead, the message becomes this: That if you just wizen up a bit and become like us, you will be fine.

and the heartaches of family life. There we can be under pressure, we are ill, the money runs out. Or, here is a family that does not share in our love for the Lord and our desire to follow Him. Unbelieving parents who do not like it when their children begin to follow the Lord. Or children who find it hard when suddenly everything in the home changes because the parents are now following the Lord. And then, there is the constant watching of the world: You say that you follow Jesus, but look at how you behave in your private life.

Levi is going to follow the Lord also in his home. And he wants his family and his friends to see that and to know Jesus there, too. So, he brings Jesus right into his home. And look at his guest list: publicans and sinners. That is a new word in the passage. Generally speaking, all of us are sinners. We know that. But the word is used in a derogatory way to refer to a specific segment of the population who did not comply with the laws of the scribes and the Pharisees. These people were labeled “sinners” by the Jewish leaders. And this label refers really to the non-religious Jews. Included under this label were not only publicans, but the criminals, the unclean, the immoral. We have an example of one of those in John 8, the woman caught in adultery—a sinner. These, with the publi-

cans, were treated as outcasts by the religious in Israel and by the synagogue. Again, they were excommunicants. These are the ones now whom Matthew brings into his home and that Jesus banquets with.

There is an important word of application here for us. First, a cautionary word. Jesus, by His attendance at this party, does not condone or excuse sin. It is not uncommon for some to take this story as an excuse for going back to the lifestyle and relationships of their state of unbelief and slipping back into the pleasures of a former life of sin. No, Jesus was in Levi’s house for one reason, and it was their salvation.

But on the other hand, and there is a fine line here, it is easy for us to follow the pattern of the Pharisees and the route of isolation and to have the idea that somehow we are more holy if we do not talk or associate with known sinners. So, we avoid interaction with all unbelievers.

Later, when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he says this in I Corinthians 5: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that

tomb and we see the grace of God come to them.

About the miracles—first, why does God send miracles? Why does He send these miracles at the time of Jesus’ resurrection? It is to confirm the truth of the resurrection. An earthquake—how appropriate that an earthquake should come to shake the place where Jesus had been buried. He was declared by the resurrection to be the Son of God with power, we read in Romans 1. That is what the earthquake signified. And the open tomb—the open tomb was not so that Jesus could get out of the tomb after He was raised from the dead. No, He was able in His glorious body to pass through walls. The open tomb was to show that the tomb was empty.

Then, grace in the heavenly messenger and what he says as well. There was an angel when they came. He came with a message of grace to these women. Look at his words: “Fear not ye.” That is personal. That is addressed to these women. He knows that they are fearful and that they are afraid and that they are confused. So God sends this messenger: “Don’t be afraid.” Yes, the Jews and the leaders of the Jews should be afraid. Yes, the soldiers should tremble and become as dead men. But “you, don’t be afraid.” He continues, “Don’t be afraid:

for I know that ye seek Jesus.” He knows why they have come. How does the angel know this? It is because God has told him. God knows why they have come. God knows their fears.

What a messenger. Sometimes angels would come in the form of a man, disguised, as it were. But this one, verse 3 tells us, had a face that was like lightning. It was like the face of Moses, who had seen God. His raiment was white like snow, holy because he had come from the presence of God. There was no mistaking—this was a heavenly messenger. They spoke with him; they had conversation with him. The keepers trembled. How remarkable! These women talked to him. This was a part of their courage. It was because they wanted to see Jesus.

So the messenger continues: “I know that ye seek Jesus.” What sympathy in those words. Sympathy is to enter into the experience of another. God knows, the Son knows, the angel knows what these women feel. God uses all the resources of heaven that are at His disposal to come and to minister to these needy women. He knows their love, their faith, their zeal, their fears, their anxieties, their confusion. He is touched with the feeling of their infirmities. He says, “I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.” How those words

must have jarred these women. After someone has been through a painful experience, we want to be very careful in the way that we speak to them. If someone is going through cancer, we do not want to talk about the disease of cancer and how difficult it can be. Or, someone has been in a car accident. We want to be careful. How jarring these words must have been to the fresh wounds that these women had. “Ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.” This calls to their mind the awful experience that they had witnessed—the horrific death of Jesus Christ. But the angel can do that because he has a message that is the answer to exactly this fear and this experience. “I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here.” Luke adds that the angel explains those words this way: “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” “He is not here: he is risen.” Why seek the living here in the place of the dead?

He is risen. That verb form has the idea of someone who has entered into a permanent state of being. He is risen—a constant change has taken place. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is that. He entered into His glorious state and He continues in that state.

It was the power of God triune that raised Him from the dead. He was raised with power. The Bible explains the resurrection from three points of view—that the Father raised His Son from the dead; that Jesus Himself arose from the dead; and that He was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. What an immense miracle was the resurrection of Jesus Christ! All the resources of the divine Being are involved in this great work. There are only a few other miracles in the Scriptures that are described this way. The creation: in the beginning the Father created; the Son was the Word by whom He created; and the Spirit moved on the face of the waters. Or the virgin birth of Jesus: the Holy Ghost would come upon the virgin Mary and she would conceive and bring forth one who would be called the Son of God. Or the work of salvation in a similar way. That is the importance of this event. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is as important as creation, as important as the incarnation, as important as the work of salvation. This is central in the gospel. This is the gospel that the New Testament church preaches. “He is not here, for He is risen.”

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be a disciple of Christ by following what He has told me in His Word, by believing all that He says in the Scriptures. Now we do not get to walk in His literal steps in Galilee and Judea, but He teaches us from the Bible, through the Word preached, and He calls us to follow Him.

Then, third, following Jesus for Levi meant a complete turning from his former life. He was not just spicing up his life with a little religion, a little of Jesus. No. This was different even than the conversion of those who had been fishermen. Theirs was a noble calling. But Matthew could not see for a little while how this would go and then fall back into his former occupation. In fact, in Luke’s gospel we read that he forsook all and followed Him. This changed his entire life. That is true conversion. Maybe you continue in the same job or live in the same house after conversion, but you say, “This is not mine. It belongs to the Lord because I belong to the Lord.” That was true of Matthew. And that is immediately evident in what follows in verse 15.

“It came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house [that is, in Levi’s house].” Now, we do not know when that happened. It could have been the same day, or it could have been a week later. But you see what is taking place here. Matthew

has a house; he has some wealth. He uses this to gather his former friends together at a feast with Jesus. Jesus is the honored guest. And in verse 15 we read that they “sat at meat,” that is, that they reclined at a banquet. And this verse also tells us who was there: there were many publicans and sinners with Jesus and His disciples. And the end of the verse tells us that these many now were also followers of Jesus. That is a remarkable thing. Because what it is telling us is this, that as soon as Matthew began to follow Jesus, he went back to his former friends. He shared with them what God in His greatness had done for him, and he called them to follow Jesus with him. He gathered them together for this meal. We could call this meal a conversion party. And Jesus was there. Matthew is not ashamed to bring Jesus right into his home. And Jesus is not ashamed to be there with publicans and sinners.

This again points to how far conversion has gone in the life of Levi. He is not just a public Christian, but when he goes into his private home, Jesus is there with him. He honors the Lord in his private life, in his home life. So often that is the most difficult place to be a follower of Jesus, especially if you are a new convert. In that little space called home are the disagreements and the disappointments

a Syro-Phoenician woman, a murderous thief. And these were not called simply as tokens to satisfy a minority. Jesus was not thinking, “Well, I should have a tax collector among the twelve.” But among these kinds of people, He labored and worked. These were the sinners that became central to His ministry. And Levi becomes Matthew, an apostle who writes the first gospel account. If you look down to verse 15, you see that many of the publicans and tax collectors followed Him. Think of the tax offices that day, at that time, closed all over Galilee. And the people slipping by and saying to each other: “Where is the inspector, where is the tax collector?” “Oh, he has become religious. He is following Jesus.” And Jesus was not embarrassed to company with such.

There is one more thing for us to note here about Levi. This takes us back to the sovereign call of Jesus. That is the genuineness and the completeness of his conversion. He did not simply, in a pressured environment, pray a prayer, sign his name on a card, and two weeks later find himself back in his former lifestyle of sin. No! When Jesus says, “Follow Me,” we read at the end of verse 14 that “he arose and followed him.” When God comes and converts a man, He works graciously in his heart, and this changes his mind about sin and changes the

entire direction of his life. That is conversion. It is lifelong, it is on-going.

What did this mean for Levi? First it meant that he admits that he is a sinner. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 10, verse 3, when Levi lists the disciples, he gives himself a nickname: Matthew the publican. Why does he do that? He does not identify any of the other disciples with a nickname except Judas, who betrayed the Lord. And this is what he is saying: “I’m just a sinner. That is all I am. Despised by my fellow men.” Can you imagine what Peter and James and John thought of this choice of Jesus? Matthew, a publican? And he is saying, “God in His grace has called me.” This is what it means for any one of us to be followers of Jesus. As Paul says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” First, admitting you are a sinner in humility.

Second, to follow Jesus meant for Levi that he became a student of the Word and teaching of Jesus. That is what it meant to follow Jesus in His ministry, to listen to His authoritative teaching, to be a student. Levi learned everything from the Lord. And we, too, follow Jesus by following His Word in the Scriptures. And we never stop doing that. Every day we say, Today, I’m going to

Then the angel says one more thing to the women: “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.” This is a reminder to them of what Jesus had promised before His death. We might have expected the angel to rebuke them. Instead, this is a message of comfort and encouragement to these women who are so confused and afraid. There is a mildness. Their unbelief is rebuked but forgiven. Luke tells us in Luke 24:8 that, at the angel’s word, these women remembered what Jesus had said.

Then the angel, having spoken this beautiful message, invites these women to come. “Come,” he says, “see the place where the Lord lay.” Matthew does not give us any more detail than this. He wants the emphasis to fall on this: that the tomb was open and empty. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay. He is not here, he is risen.” The empty tomb is the proof to these women that Jesus is risen from the dead. Notice one thing here in what the angel says: “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” “Lord” is a name that refers to sovereignty and to rule. It refers to Jesus as the one who has the victory, who has overcome, who exercises dominion. The one who is our Savior, the one who is our Christ, is also our Lord. This is especially His resurrection title. The angel’s calling Him

Lord means He has overcome the grave and He rules over sin and death. Later in this day the disciples will exclaim to each other: “The Lord is risen; He is risen indeed.” When Thomas, a week later, sees Jesus, he will say, “My Lord and my God!” You see, this name emphasizes that Jesus has the victory. And what a victory it was!

Perhaps you stood at a cemetery before. It is a somber place. I have stood in cemeteries, at gravesides, with beloved believers, and we have wept together. It is a quiet place. But here the angel speaks with a thundering voice. He says, “Come, come on a grand tour of this cemetery, of this grave. I will show you something marvelous. He is not here. He is risen.”

Luke indicates that there was more than one angel, that, in fact, when the women came into the tomb they saw a second angel. John tells us that these angels sat one at the head and one at the foot of the place where Jesus was laid. John also gives us the details of the place where He had lain—the eyewitness account of Peter and John and what they saw in the tomb, the clothes lying wrapped together as they had been around the body of Jesus, and then the linen cloth folded separately, showing the care and personal touch of the Savior. Perhaps these women, who knew Jesus

so well, knew His habits and would see this personal touch. This was not a pile of clothes that someone had hurriedly gotten out of but, carefully, the Savior had folded this napkin and laid it aside. This is what they saw.

He is risen. He is risen indeed! And they hurried back to the disciples with the message of the resurrection of the Savior, with joy in their hearts. You see, that message that the angel gave was the end of their confusion and the end of their fears and their anxiety.

So it is for us today. In all our fears, in all our confusion, in all our anxiety, in all our questions—this is the hopeful message that the angel brings: “Fear not ye; He is not here, He is risen.” Think about your fears. What are they? Is one of them your sin? If you have a true sense of your sin and a true sense of the majesty and the holiness of God and even a real understanding of the reason that Jesus had to die and the price that He had to pay for sin—well, of course, then you will fear before God. There is the fear of what sin deserves. But the resurrection answers these fears. It tells us that Jesus Christ paid the full price for our sins. Because He is risen, we are forgiven. His resurrection

is the testimony to us today that all of our sins are gone. In the resurrection, God Himself put the “Amen” on all of Jesus’ work. He said in His suffering at the very end, “It is finished.” Now, in the resurrection, God says, as it were, “It is finished, indeed!” I Corinthians 15 puts it this way in the negative: “If Christ be not

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risen...your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.... But now is Christ risen.” You are

not in your sins yet. Your faith is not vain. The point is that the price has been paid for sins and the victory has been won. We do not need to hide from the wrath of God, for Jesus Christ has paid the price.

Or perhaps it is your sins from this point of view: the fear of being overwhelmed by the power of remaining sin in your life or the temptations of Satan and the world around you. The resurrection means we do not have to be afraid. Jesus is risen from the dead. He has given us new life, life in which there is victory and strength and perseverance. Just as Jesus Himself has entered into the permanent glorious state of His resurrection, so He will do for us, and the good work that He has begun in us He will perform till the day of Jesus Christ. Fear not, He is risen.

see two things. First, his name and lineage tell us that he is a Jew. Levi is a Jewish name. Second, we see that he is a tax collector or publican. And that leads us to a third thing, this: that he is despicable, the scum of society because, as a Jew, he works for the occupying, foreign government. And he does that for his own personal gain. To become a tax collector, you had to buy a franchise through a bidding process. Really, what you promise the Roman authority is that, in a year, you would give him a certain amount for collecting taxes in a certain region. Then, how you raised that money was entirely up to you.

Levi is described as sitting at the receipt of customs. This indicates that he was the tax collector who dealt directly with the public, collecting tolls and export and import taxes. Capernaum was on a main trade-route, and the last main town before you pass from the region of Herod Antipas to the region of Herod Philip. Everything that went by land or water was taxed: letters, goods, animals. They would count the packages and count how many wheels and how many animals and so on. This was Levi’s task. Through this, the publican, or the tax collector, often became wealthy. You can think of another tax collector in Jericho, Zacchaeus, who was wealthy.

Levi himself, we will see here, had a sizable house.

So, here he is, a Jew, and a tax collector, who is considered a traitor and a thief, who had gotten wealthy by stealing from his own countrymen. That is how he would have been viewed and treated. You did not invite a tax collector to your home. That would spoil the atmosphere. They were not allowed in the synagogue or the temple. They were forbidden legal rights. They were not allowed to be witnesses in court dealings. Essentially they were excommunicants. Here was a man who was used to being maligned and mistreated, cursed by the people. He was the scum of low-life.

Now Jesus comes and calls this man into His band of disciples. He does not treat him disrespectfully, throwing money on the ground for him to pick up. No, He comes right up to him, loves him, looks him in the eye and says, “You, Levi, follow Me.” Is not that extraordinary? And is that not beautiful? And you see that that is the point of the passage. Jesus came for people like this. Jesus had a plan to use people like this in His kingdom.

And, it becomes the pattern. Simon, the Zealot, was a revolutionary. Mary Magdalene was demon-possessed. The Samaritan woman was five times married. A Roman centurion,

What stands out in this passage is that the choice was entirely Jesus' choice. The command came from Jesus, the initiative was from Jesus. Levi, or Matthew, was not tucked away in the back of the crowd when Jesus started appealing and pressuring His audience to make a choice entirely their own to come forward and make a decision to be a follower of Jesus. Not like that at all. Levi was not at a meeting. He was collecting taxes, at work, making money. And he missed the preaching altogether. But Jesus did not miss him. There you see who makes the choice. The Good Shepherd leaves the flock and comes searching for His lost sheep. He calls him by name. Jesus speaks a command to Levi, an individual: "Follow Me." And Levi rose and followed Him.

This teaches us that choice, absolute choice, does not belong to us but to God. We do have desires. But we are creatures with limitations. And often we are disappointed because we cannot get what we choose. But God is sovereign. And especially now in salvation. In Romans, chapter 9:21, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" That is on the foreground here. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has come to seek and to save those whom the Father has given to Him.

Later on, in the Upper Room, He will say to the twelve disciples: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." And we can picture Levi nodding his head in agreement.

These are not difficult words to understand. They are so simple. The problem is believing these humbling words, that God has found me, a sinner, that God has chosen me, and not the other way around. As you read through Scripture from cover to cover, this is what you see. God is not portrayed as a helpless spectator who gazes into some crystal ball and can see ahead of time who will choose Him and then takes note of it. That is not election at all! No, Jesus says, "I have chosen you." To Levi, He says, "Follow Me." In other words, from a personal point of view, the explanation for your being a Christian and a believer today is that God loved you in Jesus Christ from before the foundation of the world. And now, in time, He has come and found you by the power of the gospel and the inworking of His Holy Spirit, which together are the effectual call. And He has called you to Himself according to His eternal choice in election. That is a wonderfully encouraging thought, especially when we see who we are by nature. We see that in this message by looking at this man Levi.

Who was he? In the text, we

Or there are other fears that we have—the fears of the unknown future, fears because of health or financial struggles or politics or the affairs of the nations, fears because we have children and we worry about their future in the end times, fears because we know that the church of God will face persecution in the future. Perhaps there is even this fear, that you have something that is good and you love it and you hold to it very tightly and you

fear that you will lose it. Jesus knew that. He said to His disciples: "Take no thought for the morrow." He is saying in that that the Father has sovereign rule over all the affairs of your life in the future. We know that now, because Jesus is risen from the dead. As the one who is risen from the dead, He has been given this dominion and this power over all things. Everything in the present is in His hands. Everything in the future is in His hands. And the hands of Jesus are good hands and loving hands and strong hands.

Ephesians 1:20ff. is talking about the power of God and the demonstration of that power, and then it says this: "which he wrought in Christ when he

raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and power and might and dominion; and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over

*Jesus rules over all things
as the resurrected,
ascended Lord,
in His glory,
for the sake of His church.
Fear not*

all things to the church." That means, for the advantage of the church. Jesus rules over all things as the resurrected,

ascended Lord, in His glory, for the sake of His church. Fear not.

I think of the words that Jesus says to His disciples in Luke 12:32. He is speaking to them, as they are representative of the church. He says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He describes the church in the world as defenseless, a little flock, sheep, small. "Fear not," He says. The Father's good pleasure is to give you the kingdom. How does the Father give you the kingdom? He does it through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Or, perhaps, there is for you the real fear of death and the grave, the prospect of death. As believers, we do not necessarily

have a fear of the judgment, but the experience of death itself is fearful. Disease, old age, and there is nothing so painful as the tearing apart of our existence—the breaking apart of body and soul. Perhaps, in your sickness, you imagine your own death and you tremble at the thought. “Fear not,” that is the message of the angel, “Jesus is risen.” We do not need to be afraid of death. Jesus entered into the grave, and all the suffering of death, to transform it, to make it a place of rest, to make death a servant that will bring us into the glory of the presence of God. Death is described in Scripture as sleeping, sleeping in Jesus with hope. We fall asleep in Jesus in the hope of the bodily resurrection, seeing death as a transition into the very presence of God.

So, this is the victory note of the resurrection

of Jesus Christ: “Fear not ye, He is risen!” That is the end of all our fears. You can take any fear that you have and look at it through faith in Jesus Christ and be able to overcome that fear.

So today, as we confess that Jesus is risen from the dead (and

remember this on this Resurrection Sunday, the first day of the week), let us stand, by faith, at the tomb of Jesus and hear the voice of the angel: “Fear not ye, He is not here; for He is risen.” Let us tour the tomb, by faith, and see it empty and see the empty grave clothes and see Jesus risen victorious. He has overcome the grave, He has overcome sin, He has overcome Satan. He is Lord of all. He will overcome every obstacle. He is able to save to the uttermost. He will bring us, in the end, to glory.

Do not be afraid.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the wonder and the victory of

*Let us tour the tomb,
by faith, and see it empty
and see the empty grave clothes
and see Jesus risen victorious.*

the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Fill us with an assurance that, because He is Lord

over all, we do not need to be afraid. But all things are in His hand, for our sake. So we pray that we may have this confidence as we look forward, and even as we face the prospect of death ourselves, to know the victory that is ours in Jesus Christ. We ask it for His sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 25, 2021
No. 4086

I Came to Call Sinners
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Mark 2:13-17

And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, they that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

In Mark 2 we have four confrontations between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees, and one more at the beginning of chapter 3. Today we look at the second of these five confrontations.

Last week, in the first, we looked at the conflict over the authority and the identity of Jesus. Did He have the right to forgive sins? Jesus demonstrated that He had this right by His power of healing the man that was sick with the palsy. He had the divine right to do this.

In today's conflict, the dispute is over Jesus' association with publicans and sinners. Jesus answers this by saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” In this passage we will see the compassion of the Savior over against the cold-hearted, self-righteousness of the Jewish leaders. We will see that the One who has the right to forgive sins is also a merciful Savior to all who come in sorrow and repentance to Him.

The story begins in verses 13 and 14 with the unlikely call and conversion of Matthew. Jesus is preaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And, as He moves down the road, He passes what is called here the “receipt of customs,” or we would say, the tax office. And He does this very purposefully to call one of the tax collectors, Levi, who is also called Matthew, to follow Him.

would come to the cross. He would be put to death. But He is declaring here at the beginning of His ministry what He would accomplish by His death. So, we read at the end of verse 12 that they were “amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.” We have never seen anything like this before!

They glorified God. That is worship. They worshiped God on account of this man’s forgiveness. What a moment. Jesus is pressing into their consciousness who He is and why He has come. In chapter one that was, “I come not just to do miracles but to proclaim the good news of the gospel.” “Now, I’ve come not just to proclaim the good news of the gospel, but I’ve come to declare the forgiveness of sins. This is who I am, and where the divine Person empowers.” Amazed, they worship Him in awe.

We close with these three thoughts.

First, we have here on display the authority of Jesus. He preached with authority, He cast out demons with authority, He healed the sick with authority. And now that is taken to a whole new level. Who can forgive sins, but God only. Who has the right to do this, but God only. No angel in heaven; no man upon earth; no church and council; no minister of a denomination can take away the sinner’s load of

guilt from his conscience and give him peace with God. All that a man can do is point him to the fountain of forgiveness. They cannot put away sin from God’s sight. God only. And now here, without blasphemy, is the One who says, “I come to forgive.” God in the flesh.

Second. Is not that wonderful? To know that this is the power of our Savior? Jesus Christ is our Mediator, the One who stands before a just God who will by no means clear the guilty, and between us, guilty sinners. And, do you not see in your guilt and before the wrath of God the need of covering, the need of forgiveness? Here is Jesus, the High Priest that we need: strong to save, mighty to forgive. Merciful. Hebrews says that with such a High Priest, let us come boldly to the throne of grace.

And that really leaves us with a question, in the third place, why do you come to Jesus? Do you come for pardon? There are many reasons that one might come. You come with your family. You come to save your reputation. Here they came for miracles. Today, health and wealth—you come for prosperity, some for purity or friendship. Why do you come to Jesus? Do you come for pardon? And do you come with the faith of these five? Come to Jesus. With Him there is full and free forgiveness.

Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 11, 2021
No. 4084

The Cleansing of the Leper
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

We are continuing this study of Mark, chapter 1:40-45, which is the text for this message.

And there came a leper to him beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straightly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

We are given here no personal details concerning this man whom Jesus healed, simply this: A leper came to Him (v. 40). The point is that the focus is not the man but the disease. That is

because, of all the diseases that are in the Scriptures, God chose out this one to be a living illustration of our spiritual disease of sin. Leprosy was the most feared of all diseases in ancient times. There was no cure. It led to certain death. Once you had received the diagnosis, it was like receiving a death sentence. Today, it would be similar to hearing the words, “You have terminal cancer.” Only, the physical effects of leprosy were far more obvious and disfiguring than a cancer would be. Leprosy led not only to being physically disfigured, but it led to being socially despised and religiously defiled.

Leprosy is a virus that begins with some skin discoloration and nerve pain. Soon the skin becomes scaly and thick, and the patch spreads. It attacks especially the extremities—the fingers and the toes, the arms and the legs, the ears and the nose. The disease is systemic. That means it attacks not only the skin but every system in the body—especially the nervous system, so that there is no feeling in the extremities. And the one who has leprosy tries to rub and scratch and soon has rubbed off his skin. A sore develops that becomes infected. The flesh begins to rot. The digits (the fingers and

the toes) fall off. Hands turn into stumps, and soft tumors develop under the skin. The skin bunches up, especially in the cheeks and the foreheads, so that the face of one who has leprosy looks like the face of a lion. The throat becomes hoarse, the voice raspy, and a foul odor emits from the body. Hair falls out from the head and the face. Eyebrows and eyelashes are gone. The victim develops stomach ulcers, so he cannot eat. He becomes vulnerable to all kinds of diseases. He usually dies a slow, awful death as leprosy progressively destroys the body.

From Scripture, it seems that leprosy was contagious, although that has been questioned. Regardless, the Old Testament gives very strict instructions for those who have this disease and for handling this disease. You can read that in Leviticus 13 and 14, where we read of the procedure, diagnosis, the rules for quarantine, and especially the regulations for those who have the disease and are declared permanently unclean. They must cover their mouths when they talk. They must announce their disease by crying out, "Unclean, unclean" whenever someone comes toward them. They must not approach to within six feet of other individuals. And the disease was considered so serious that, on a windy day, they were not allowed to come

within a hundred and fifty feet of others! They were not allowed to live in walled cities or communities with those who were not infected. So they live off in their own little commune with others in a similar plight. They cannot work, they cannot live with their families. They are cut off and it is permanent.

And if indeed, as some have surmised, leprosy was not contagious, all of this would seem quite arbitrary. Yet, God had commanded it to be this way.

Why all these regulations? The answer is: God chose this to be the graphic illustration of sin. There are many diseases that Jesus healed, but none of them stand out so clearly a picture of sin as leprosy. The focus here in the gospels and in the Scriptures of the Old Testament laws is on the disease, so that you and I might learn about our sin. The sin in our souls, in our natures, is spiritual leprosy with which every one of us is infected. As leprosy affects the whole person, so does sin. As leprosy is systemic, so is sin. As leprosy runs deeper than the skin, so does sin. As leprosy is ugly and loathsome, so is sin. As leprosy contaminates and spreads, so does sin. As leprosy leads to death, so does sin. As leprosy results in the loss of feeling, so that the person is unresponsive, so it is when one is in sin. As leprosy is completely incurable

the defensive with that question, and then He asks another question in verse 9: "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" And what is important for understanding the question of Jesus here is the word "say." What is easier to say? And He gives them two options: Is it easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or is it easier to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk"? In which can a man's authority be verified? Of course, it is much easier to say, Your sins are forgiven. Who can see that—that witness of the Spirit in the heart of the individual. It is much more difficult to say, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And Jesus' point now is this: If He says, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," and the paralytic rises, there would be an indisputable proof of who He is and His authority and His right.

So, Jesus turns (and you can see how He is provoking the scribes and the Pharisees), Jesus turns to the man and He says this: "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," I am going to say what is more difficult. Then He turns to the man and He says, "Rise, take up thy bed, go thy way into thine house." This will be the moment of truth. No doubt the room was dead silent. Either He

was deceiving them, or He was, as He claimed, the Son of man, the Messiah. And the One who had the power to forgive sins.

Now, many in that room knew exactly what would happen. They followed Jesus. They had seen His miracles. But now He has demonstrated to them something even greater. Here is not just the Son of man, but the Savior of men. And so they watched. And, as Jesus spoke those words, unseen to any human eyes, the same power that had made heaven and earth began to work in this man's limbs. His two legs were healed. His muscles were made strong in a moment. His strength became full. He arose, he folded his bed under his arms, and he walked out of there. No therapy. He did not crawl. He did not need someone to help him get off the ground. He did not lean on anyone to get out of the room. He simply got up and he walked out. There was no way, just minutes earlier that this man could come to Jesus, to get into this room. And now, here he is. And in amazement, they moved back, and the man leaves the scene.

Irrefutable proof is given by Jesus here that He had the power and the authority to forgive sins. And we know that this power that is demonstrated in the miracle looks ahead to and is rooted in the cross. Jesus

is their reasoning. And they were right. Nobody can forgive sins but God only. They knew the Scriptures. They could have quoted Psalm 130: "If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquity, O LORD, who should stand. But with thee, there is forgiveness." God who did it. Isaiah 43: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake and will not remember thy sins." Nobody else, God only! And that is because, as we have seen, all sin is against God, no one else. No religious institution, no system, no ritual, no baptism, no sacrament, no membership, no obedience can earn forgiveness of sins. God only forgives.

So they sit there. Jesus says, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." And they begin to question. Does this man have the right to forgive sin? That is the idea of power here. He has the authority to forgive sins (v. 10). Blasphemy!

What we should see here on clear display in the hard hearts of these scribes and Pharisees is the depraved heart of man. This is man as he is by nature before the good news of the gospel. This is the unregenerate response to spiritual things. The natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are spiritually discerned. That is what you have here: men whose minds are hardened, are dark to the mysteries of the gospel. And

the only way for their eyes to be opened is that God does this by the power of His Holy Spirit. It was God, by His Holy Spirit, who brought these four friends and this paralytic to Jesus. God gave them faith.

You have certainly run into that before in your life, have you not? A neighbor, a family member, a friend, and acquaintance at work. You talk to them about Christ and the good news of the gospel. You give them things to listen to. You give them things to read. You pray fervently for them. You go back to them. You follow up, but, you see, until God opens their hearts, they are blind. That does not mean that you stop. You keep on bringing Christ. But it is God who effectually works the call of the gospel in the hearts of man. And what we have in the Pharisees is a spiritual illustration of the paralytic. They walk in darkness.

Demonstrated

How does Jesus respond to them? Verse 8: "And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves." He did not wait—immediately. You can imagine their surprise as Jesus exposes their heart with a question: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" Another demonstration of who He is, not just perception, but His knowledge as God. He puts them on

by man, so also is sin. And just as whatever is touched by leprosy must be burned, so the sinner is fit for hellfire. As leprosy isolates one from fellowship, so does sin separate you from your God. And as leprosy can be cured only by God, so the only cure for sin is God's grace for us in Jesus Christ.

*As leprosy can be cured
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There is nothing that so well pictures the hideousness and the destructiveness of sin. Sin is loathsome and damnable. And you see from this description that I have given of leprosy why this is so important. It is showing to every one of us how horrible we are on account of our sin, how destructive our sin is, what we deserve on account of our sin. We are unclean. We deserve to be cast out.

Do you know yourself as a spiritual leper? Or do you tend to think of your sin as something more like a partial blindness, or being deaf in one ear, or maybe a disability for which you can learn a skill for coping? No, we are unclean! Altogether filthy and helpless. So, Romans 3:12: "They are *all* [universally] gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good, no not one." According to Psalm 14:2,

3, "the LORD looked down upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Is this how you see yourself, as a spiritual leper, unclean, defiled, helpless?

So, first we have here this horrible disease, and it is a description of a man. And this man is in the developed stages. He is full of leprosy, Luke says. And he comes, in verse 40, to Jesus. He comes. That is the second thing—the leper is coming. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That coming to Jesus is believing on Him. And in the leper's coming to Him, we have an outstanding example of one coming in faith to Jesus.

Notice the elements. First, you see here his boldness. That he came at all was remarkable. This was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic law. It was so socially unacceptable that when people did this, when lepers did this, the people would pick up stones and hurl them at the violator. He knew that he had no right to come, and yet, here

he comes through the crowd, pushing toward Jesus (perhaps with his hand over his mouth) and crying out in a raspy voice: “Unclean, unclean.” And, like the waters of the Red Sea parting, the multitude parts as this man comes to the feet of Jesus. Do you have the boldness in coming to Jesus when so many would scorn you and turn you away?

Notice, second, his reverence in coming. Mark says he came to Jesus and kneeled down. Matthew says he came worshipping Him and called Him “Lord.” What he does here is that he acknowledges the greatness of Jesus, and he falls down prostrate before Him with his face on the ground. Is this how you come to Jesus, in reverence and awe?

Then notice, third, coupled with his reverence is humility. He comes, certainly confident that Jesus has the power to heal. He has heard about Jesus’ miracles. But as he comes, he knows his own unworthiness, and there is no demand in what he says to Jesus. Instead, in verse 40, “If thou wilt,” or “If you are willing.” Now Jesus’ willingness is not really questioned. Jesus says elsewhere, “He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” Jesus will receive all who come to Him because they come on account of the Father’s drawing them to Him. He says,

“No man comes to me except the Father draw him.” That coming, then, is a work of God’s grace, on account of God’s electing grace. So Jesus never turns away those who come. But what this leper is acknowledging is this, that though Jesus receives sinners, there is nothing in the sinner, nothing in himself, that makes him worthy. His being received is entirely of the grace of Christ. He comes empty, helpless, destitute. Do you come to Jesus like that? Or do you hold unto your self-righteousness for acceptance with God?

Then, fourth, we see in the leper’s coming his beautiful confession. “If thou wilt,” he says, “thou canst make me clean.” You can make me clean, he says to Jesus. Looking at his stubby fingers, his rotten flesh, he knows that that disease is irreversible. He knows that he cannot change it. But, looking to Jesus, he says, “Lord, you are able, you can do it. Thine is the power, the authority, to fully heal me.” What shadow of guilt are you living under? What dominating sin is there in your life? Are you not sure that Jesus has the power to cleanse you? “Thou canst make me clean!” That is his confession.

Here is the sinner who, under the operations of God’s Spirit and grace, comes in faith to the Savior, humbly and empty, and confidently. We can come con-

conditionally. You cannot buy forgiveness. You cannot sell forgiveness. You cannot earn forgiveness. God gives it freely.

If ever a man could do nothing, it was this man. Paralyzed, like the thief on the cross. What could he do? There is nothing greater than for us to know that forgiveness of sins comes freely, graciously. We do not *do* to receive, but it is freely granted. This forgiveness is full, complete. Notice the plural. Jesus says, “Son, thy *sins*.” That word represents in the plural all of this man’s sins—past, present, and future. And when God justifies the ungodly, in his justification every sin is forgiven, every sin is laid on Jesus Christ and the price is paid for our sin.

So this man is forgiven in an instant. He leaves forgiven. Like the publican who went up to the temple to pray, he went home to his house justified. Jesus, in the word “forgive,” sent away all his sins and all the handwriting of them that was against him. That is forgiveness declared by Jesus. If never he walked again, he was a happy man, forgiven!

Disputed

“Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Jesus said that for the audience. Here were the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said that to provoke them. There were in that house certain of the scribes and Pharisees, we read. Who

were they and what were they doing here? The scribes and Pharisees are the educated, religious elite, heads full of knowledge. And they were here to listen to Jesus and to trap Him in His words. This is early in Jesus’ ministry and already they are after Him. They are malicious hypocrites. They are not here to be instructed by Jesus but to be critical and to be contentious. It is striking that we read in verse 6, that there were certain of the scribes *sitting* there. They assumed a sitting position before Jesus. Jesus is on trial before them. That is the point. His ministry is hardly begun. This is the first time they have heard him publicly speaking, but already He is on trial.

And you see that in verse 7, in their censorious thoughts, “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” “And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned *within themselves*.” They were judging. Who can forgive sins but God only? And their conclusion: This is blasphemy. What is blasphemy? Blasphemy is to say something that is irreverent and profane against *God!* And the way that they saw this as blasphemy (you see this later when Jesus is on trial before His crucifixion) was that “He makes himself equal with God.” That is the blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God only? That

be forgiven thee. This is the good news, this is the gospel that Jesus preached. We see it already in chapter 1, verses 14 and 15: He preached the gospel of the kingdom of God and He said, “Repent ye and believe the gospel.”

And now, here are filthy, hell-bound, law-breaking sinners, despite their sins, brought into the household of God. That is the gospel. That is the good news that we preach.

This is what He was preaching. He was preaching the good news and here this man was. Really, He continued the sermon: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

In that declaration, there are important things for us to learn about the forgiveness of sins, especially as we look at, as it were, this first movement of this story. Before the miracle, first you see here that the forgiveness of sins is the primary, the most important need that we have. All other needs are secondary. They bring him with a physical need, an obvious physical need. He cannot walk. He is paralyzed. And Jesus says, as it were, “I’ll get you your legs in a minute, but let’s talk about your sin before God. Let’s talk about your heart. This is why I came. My power to do miracles is incidental to this real work. This miracle is only a sign.” You see how primary this is. This is our need, our great need. What-

ever your needs today, physical, spiritual, relational, emotional, personal—this is your real need: to hear the declaration of the Savior: “Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven.” Everything else is secondary.

And we see here also the necessity of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus does not treat this need of forgiveness lightly. He does not say, “Well, I see you’re here. Let’s not talk about sin now. That might upset you.” He saw forgiveness of sins as necessary. Though this man has other needs, his primary need was this. And the church today that overlooks and treats sin lightly, and does not proclaim the righteousness of God and forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ, has lost the gospel, the good news.

We see here, too, that forgiveness is divine, it is a divine declaration. God alone can forgive sins because all sin, in the end, is committed against God, and none but God has, as it were, access to the records of heaven and the freedom to forgive. This declaration comes from the mouth of God, not with regard to what man has done, but it comes in justification as a declaration in spite of what we have done, in spite of who we are. So this forgiveness is free, it is sovereign and free. God determines who will be forgiven and He forgives freely and un-

fidently because we have here in the passage a compassionate Savior who will not turn away any who come to Him in true faith. And that is what we learn here about the person and the work of Jesus. In this miracle, we have a demonstration not so much of the power of Jesus, as the compassion of Jesus. Look at verse 41. How is Jesus going to respond to this leper who has broken all the protocol? You can imagine the horror and the disdain of the crowd, and even of the disciples, wondering: What is He going to do now? How will He handle this?

“And Jesus, moved with compassion.” The word here has the idea of feeling something very deeply, in your bowels, deep down, a gut feeling. When Jesus looked at this man, He was not repulsed by this man but He connected with him on the deepest level. He understood his desperation. He felt his loneliness. He saw the effects, the curse of sin. And He did the unthinkable. When everyone else fell back in revulsion, He stepped forward, He leaned over to the man lying prostrate on the ground. He stretched out His hand and He touched the leper.

Now, if you look at the text,

you see that the healing power of Jesus was not in the touch. Verse 42 says that as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him. And that fits with everything else in this chapter. The word that Jesus spoke came with such authority that when Jesus had spoken here, “Be thou clean,” the man was clean. Jesus did not need to touch him to heal him. In fact, what Jesus did here was strictly forbidden. Now He would be unclean. Now He would be required to quarantine.

Now, think of this from the point of view of the leper. Jesus touched him. When was the last time he had been touched by someone who was not like him, a leper? Jesus touched Him. That is a very beautiful thing to do a study of, in the gospels—the touch of Jesus. Especially in the gospel of Mark, Jesus touched those who suffered. Jesus could have performed any one of the miracles that He performed

	<i>In reaching out and touching, Jesus gives to us a profound display of His love and pity, His power and His willingness.</i>		of healing without touching. So, why does He touch? In reaching out and touching,
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Jesus gives to us a profound display of His love and pity, His power and His willingness. In His reaching down, His coming down from heaven and entering into our flesh and blood, our suf-

fering and curse, taking that on Himself, feeling it very deeply, so that we read of Him that He was tempted in all points like as we are, He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He felt that very deeply. He identified with us. He became one of us. And He who knew no sin became sin for us. With His holy hand, He touched us in our sin and He was defiled for us.

In the passage, you see the healing power of Jesus. On display in the healing power of Jesus is, as reported here by Mark, the power of the cross that cleanses us from all our sins and defilement. Notice that the verb used here is not healed, but cleansed.

He did not heal the leper, but He cleansed the leper. This miracle helps us to see something that we often neglect to see, and that is the cleansing

power and the accomplishment of Jesus Christ on the cross. The healing of this man was immediate, verse 42: "And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed." The healing was complete. This disease that had progressively worsened over the years and taken away parts of his flesh and his feeling, in a moment was gone. His fingers

came back. His ears and his nose were made whole. His hair returned. An incurable disease was reversed.

Beloved, that is the power of the cross of Jesus Christ! It covers all our guilt and removes all our defilement and shame to work as a power within us as new creatures to overcome all sin. If any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

And, as I say, we often neglect to realize the power of the blood and the cross of Jesus Christ. I say that because of the way this chapter concludes. Did this man who was healed know

that he was healed? Did he experience the cleansing power of Jesus? And, as we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, do we know it?

Have we experienced it? This man knew it. He knew it so much that in his newfound life and zeal and health he went beyond what Jesus had commanded him. He was a disobedient witness. Look at verse 43 and the way the chapter ends. "And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away." Jesus gives to this man a double charge, a double command. And

On display in the healing power of Jesus is, as reported here by Mark, the power of the cross that cleanses us from all our sins and defilement.

mate place where Jesus was in the house, and they remove the roof. Now, this was not like just removing a few tiles or pieces of wood. But these were roofs that were made with wood that was laid crisscross and then packed down with branches and then with mud and clay. So, really, they begin to dig on the roof.

You can well imagine the disruption inside, for the multitude that are pressed in the house around Jesus. If you were near Jesus, you would have heard a noise above your head and then seen a shaft of light coming into the room. And soon a face or two peering down, debris falling from above into your hair and on your clothes. And they keep digging and digging until they have dug a hole that is big enough to let a bed through.

Faith is the victory that overcomes. You see that here in their faith, a persistence, a perseverance, an active faith.

And they let him down with some rope to the feet of Jesus. Here is a paralyzed man at the feet of Jesus who is proclaiming the good news of the gospel. What a picture: a believing, paralyzed man at the feet of Jesus.

There is a sign here of who we are by nature. This man's faith has brought him, powerless in himself, to the feet of Jesus. Do you see yourself in

him: helpless, coming to the feet of Jesus to hear the good news?

Declared

Then we have in the passage forgiveness declared. Jesus' response is worthy of note. Did Jesus respond, "I'm busy preaching, this is more important. You have interrupted me"? No, He sees their faith. And when you look at the gospels, Jesus often calls attention to strong faith. He wants the people to see this. He never responded by turning those away who came with a strong faith. When the parents were bringing their children, and the disciples tried to turn them away, Jesus rebuked them. When the Syrophenician comes and Jesus says, "No, the food of the table is not for the dogs," she says, "Yes, but the dogs get the crumbs." When the Roman centurion comes and says, "You don't have to come to my house. You just speak the word and he'll be healed," Jesus marveled and said, "I never saw such faith, no not in Israel."

And here, by this miracle, He calls attention to their faith. He sees their faith. He sees beyond what they have done, into their hearts, and He stops His preaching. He says the most unexpected thing: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Wonderful words that you and I want to hear from Jesus. But unexpected! "Son." He brings this man, by His words, into the family of God. Thy sins

Now, I think it is obvious in this passage that the main purpose of their coming to Jesus was to have their friend healed. But Jesus uses this situation to press deeper into their consciousness their real need of Him, so that when He is finished here, this man has come to Jesus for forgiveness. When He saw their faith, He said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

This strong desire to be with Jesus was for the healing of this paralytic. But in their faith for this lesser thing, there are certainly things for us to learn about faith for the greater things, that is, forgiveness of sins.

Now, as you think about the forgiveness of sins, the greater thing, the question for us is: Do I desire forgiveness? How strongly do I desire? Is this why Jesus and the goodness of the gospel are important to me? Do I have the faith of these friends, who bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing? Verse two tells us that many were gathered there. That is an understatement! How many were gathered we do not know, but we know that the house was packed full, with standing room only, an overflow. You could not squeeze another person in. They were standing around the outside of the house, by the windows, to hear what Jesus was saying. And they kept coming like bees to a hive. Remarkable faith these five had.

We see their trust. They were convinced, they believed beyond all doubt, that Jesus could and would heal their friend. They believed His power. There was a positiveness. There was not any skepticism as they came to Jesus. Do we have that kind of faith—that the mighty God, strong to save, is our God? James says that when we come to Him in prayer, we should come "nothing doubting." There was a firmness and a trust and a confidence in their faith.

And there is a deep concern for their friend as well. Their friend is in need. And they know that if they get their friend to Jesus, there is the power for his healing. Do you have that kind of faith, that even demonstrates itself in a concern for the spiritual welfare of other sinful, hurting, dying men and women? Do you want them to be brought to Jesus? They brought him to hear the voice of Jesus.

And they were determined. Carrying a bed, a stretcher, of their paralyzed friend. And they were men on a mission. They come, verse 4, to the house. And they could not come near Him for the press. So, they uncovered the roof. You see here their persistence, their determination, their resolve. They look around. There is no way in. So they go up on the roof (most likely a flat roof with steps going up there). And they got their friend up there on the roof. They find the approxi-

notice how Jesus becomes very stern. His compassion towards the leper suddenly turns into a stern warning. He straitly charged him; He was very clear. You could say, He was straight forward. There was no question about what Jesus said. He said two things: One, he may not say anything to anyone about this healing. "See thou say nothing to any man." And, two, Jesus sent him away. That means not just that Jesus sent him away from here, but Jesus sent him away to Jerusalem, following the protocols of the Mosaic law. He must go from Galilee to Jerusalem and have his name cleared off the roles of the unclean in the proper ceremonial manner, and he must do that as a testimony to the priests. Jesus commands him to do this. Jesus tells him, This is what you must do. He is telling him to be quiet, and He sends him away to give a testimony to the Jewish leaders.

Why does Jesus do that? Why does He tell him to be quiet, in sending him away? It is not just because this is the requirement of the Mosaic law. But I think we know why. And it fits with this whole chapter. It is because Jesus does not want the multitudes to follow Him for His miracles. His desire is to preach the gospel with power and without the distraction of the miracles. Here the leper's disobedience makes that impossible. "But he went out," verse

45, "and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter."

What do we do with this man's disobedience? There are some things we can learn. And I want to conclude with these four points.

First, we really cannot fault the healed leper for his zeal. Jesus asked him to do something that is virtually impossible. "See thou say nothing to any man." He leaves. And he runs into one of his leper companions or he runs into one of his family members and they say to him: "Wow, you look good today. What happened?" He cannot handle this, right? And there is something there in that zeal, that enthusiasm, that ought to characterize the Christian. This man is operating under what some commentators call the Messianic secret. Jesus did not want this published everywhere. But that is not the case anymore. Jesus has taught us to shout it from the mountaintops, to go and tell all creatures. If you have been cleansed and you know the cleansing of your sins, you should have the enthusiasm of this man to tell others. He began to publish it much and to blaze abroad the matter.

Second, we should see here

that the real test of discipleship is not zeal but obedience. And sometimes that means doing something or going somewhere that you prefer not to do or go. Maybe that is because it lacks the excitement that you want to enjoy, or it is not a comfortable situation. Here is the true test of discipleship: You do it anyway because Jesus has called you to do it. Now, I am not talking here about obeying Jesus by going to Africa to be a missionary. Maybe that is obedience for some. But I am talking here about obeying Christ in your daily lives of discipleship—in your marriage, obeying Christ even though it is difficult. In your home—loving and serving your children, though they are so ungrateful. Obedience, that is the test of discipleship. Here, the leper failed. He did not obey.

Then, a third thing we learn here is that there is a warning against misdirected zeal—the kind of zeal that is often seen in newer Christians as an expression of their first love. It will come out in a fervent apologetic for the Christian faith or the Reformed faith. They love to engage in theological arguments. They are very confrontive in their witness to unbelievers. And there can often be a lack of love and a lack of wisdom, and the older, mature Christian will say, “Just back off a bit. Your zeal is hindering your witness.” Perhaps the

best way to put it is this way, as one of the commentators did, that our calling to witness for Christ is circumscribed to other principles of Christian living, including obedience. And, he said, sometimes our most eloquent statements are found in our silence. And our little shout then can actually hinder our testimony. There is a warning here against misdirected zeal that can hinder our witness.

Then, fourth and finally. This is really the main point of these last three verses. We have a lesson, a lesson of the chapter here, that the priority of the coming and the ministry of Jesus Christ was the *gospel*. That was His goal and purpose: to preach the good news. That is why the chapter ends this way, to tell us about the misdirected desire of the unbelieving Jews for Jesus and His miracles and to teach us that the true purpose of Jesus’ coming was to proclaim the gospel. And it leaves us with questions as we finish. Why are you coming to Jesus? Have you come wretched, needy, hideous, empty like this leper, seeking salvation in the good news of the gospel, coming to Jesus not just for a miracle, but for the forgiveness of sin? Do you say with the leper, “Thou canst make me clean”? Jesus came to preach that good news as He came into the world, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

April 18, 2021
No. 4085

Jesus’ Authority to Forgive Sins
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Mark 2:1-12:

And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy [paralyzed], which was borne [carried] of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man this speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or

to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

There are two great things that take place in these verses. The paralyzed man is healed and is able to walk, and the sinner’s sins are forgiven. It ought to be obvious which is greater.

So, let us consider Jesus’ authority to forgive sins.

Desired

When I say “desired,” I am referring to the faith of the paralytic and his four friends as they come to Jesus. Jesus calls attention to their faith in verse 5: “When Jesus saw their faith.” Their faith was something that Jesus saw. It was very evident. They had, in their coming to Jesus, a strong desire to be with Jesus, to be at the feet of Jesus. And they come to Jesus because they know He is the One who has the power to heal.