

Mark 2:13-17

February 18, 2018

Some sicknesses is accompanied by obvious symptoms. If you are achy, tired, feverish, a sore throat, a dry cough there is a better than average chance you have influenza.

The symptoms of the flu are obvious and hard to ignore.

But what is you had a disease and did not know it? Huntington's disease is one such ailment. You can carry the diseased gene for decades without knowing it.

“In 1692, residents of Salem, MA, stared at the strange “dancing” movements and violent outbursts of temper of some of their neighbors. Horrified, they concluded that anyone with such bizarre behavior must have been flirting with the devil. Two centuries later, New York physician George Huntington determined that some of his patients with strange twitching behaviors were members of families who had been treated by his father and grandfather. Huntington traced the condition to a family...from Bures in Suffolk, England, who came to Boston in 1630. He noted that if either parent had the disease, one or more offspring suffered from it. In 1872, Huntington fully described the disease that became known as Huntington's chorea, from the Greek word for “dance”.

Huntington's chorea, also called Huntington's disease (HD), is an inherited degenerative brain disorder affecting about 30,000 people in North America. In addition, about 150,000 people are at risk. Because symptoms do not develop until adult life, parents may pass the disease to their offspring without knowing it. Abnormal movements

are accompanied by progressive mental deterioration, personality changes, and loss of speech; death usually comes in 10–15 years.”

Because symptoms do not develop until adult life, parents may pass the disease to their offspring without knowing it. That is the meticulous insidiousness of Huntington’s is what makes it so alarming. It lurks within lying in wait for decades standing ready to tear down and destroy. One that will be affected carries the seeds of destruction around thinking they are healthy.

Some sickness is easy to diagnosis—like the flu. Some diseases are difficult to diagnose—like Huntington’s. The flu is easy to diagnose Huntington’s difficult. With the flu you would be sick and know it—with Huntington’s you would be sick and not know it.

As we rejoin Jesus in Mark 2, we come across two different kinds of spiritual sickness. Two different kinds of sin sicknesses. Those who are sick and know it and those who are sick and don’t know it.

One group is sin sick and they know it—like the flu—they know they are infected by sin. Another group is sick and they DO NOT know it—like Huntington’s—they have no idea that they are infected by self-righteousness a disease of the soul that lurks and lies in wait ready to tear them apart.

We continue this week to watch Jesus, to listen to Jesus to follow Jesus around as he shows himself to be the friend of sinners and the foe of self-righteous.

Some are infected and know it others are infected and don't know it. Which are you?

Jesus the great doctor of our souls offers healing for sinners and self-righteous alike.

Let's join Jesus—he is about to start preaching,

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:13-17

PRAY

Today as we watch, listen and follow Jesus around we find ourselves returning to Jesus seaside. Jesus is walking the coastline of the Sea of Galilee. He had been here before and called a clutch of fishermen to be his followers.

We are going to meet two different people—

Infected by sin and they know it.

Infected by sin and they don't know it.

1. Tax Collectors & Sinners: Infected & Aware (Mark 2:13-15)

He's preaching to the crowds again and we know what he is preaching because Mark has given us a summary before—

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

Jesus was calling to the crowd to turn from their own way and follow him. To repent and believe in him.

Within earshot was someone else, not a member of the crowd but an outsider from the crowd. Levi the tax collector. If any in the crowd saw the tax collector, they would probably spit on the ground and hurl rude words his way.

Jesus? He was just teaching and probably noticed that Levi was listening and then we read this in verse 14,

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

Mark doesn't tell us but what Jesus does right here is call the most unlikely person to be his disciple. The crowd would have been—

Appalled
Scandalized
Shocked
Revolted
Indignant

Why?

Because in the Jewish culture tax collectors were outsiders—worse than lepers. A leper didn't choose to get sick but tax collectors did chose choose to be tax collectors.

And to the Jewish mind being a tax collector and traitor were one in the same.

Why?

Israel was a small vassal state controlled by the vast and powerful Roman Empire. The Romans ruled Palestine from a distance by military strength and economic might.

Roman soldiers occupied Israel. For the Jew, they were godless barbarians treading on the Promised Land of God. The unclean, hated Romans were a constant reminder that the Jew was not free but under the all-present power of Rome.

In the Jewish mind, the Romans were their slave masters. Roman soldiers trundled about Jewish streets constantly reminding the Jews were little better than property. The Promised Land was occupied and the people of God were ruled by Rome.

No Jew like this arrangement. And I'm not sure we Americans really get this.

If you are here and an American none of you in this room knows what it is like to have your nation occupied by an invading, hostile people. We have freedom. We do not live in a police state. We do not have to cast our eyes down as we walk around in hopes that a soldier doesn't take our glance as a challenge and give us 40 lashes.

We are free in our own nation.

The Jews were not.

The Jews were occupied and their feelings were much like the French during the Nazi occupation of 1939-1945.

The citizens still spoke French but with Swastikas draped over the Champs Elyse everyone knew Nazis were in control. France was occupied by the Nazis.

If you were a French citizen—how would you feel about the Nazis?

Giselle Guillemot recalls what life was like and the feelings that plagued her in her time under German occupation. She was a resistance member but her description of living amongst and around the Nazis helps get a feel for what it was like—

We knew that the Wehrmacht carried out unannounced controls at the entrance to villages. Each time I felt like my life was hanging by a thread. I avoided looking at the soldiers for fear they would be able to see the panic in my

eyes. While they inspected my (baskets) I would think of the documents or the revolver I was hiding under the food.

I knew from experience that they would put up with our little bit of food trafficking, especially when they were dealing with a young lady. Even so I dreaded the fatal moment when a rather more zealous soldier would have the curiosity to look underneath the meat. Some days I would be seized by irrepressible anxiety. The fleeting vision of a man in a trench coat through the reflection of a shop window would instantly plunge me into a state of total panic. A suspicious noise on the staircase and I would think I was about to be arrested, taken to the Gestapo and tortured.

The way the French felt about the Nazis the Jews felt about the Romans. The Jews were occupied by the Romans. All of them knew what it was like to be 'seized by irrepressible anxiety' on hyper-alert for suspicious noises and living with fear closer than a shadow.

What does this have to do with tax collectors?

Everything.

Romans hired Jewish tax collectors. How do you think other Jews felt about tax collectors working for the Roman government?

Nothing good.

Traitor

Turncoat

Coward

Sell-out
And worse.

To the Jewish mind, tax collectors robbed their own and gave to their greatest enemy. The Jews grated against Rome but their hatred was white-hot against the tax collectors. Rome was an enemy and tax collectors traitors.

Tax collectors were so hated, so reviled, so detested, so shunned that the Jewish religious authorities said that Jews were allowed to lie with impunity to tax collectors. Further, if a tax collector ended up in their home, the home would be ritually unclean.

The lepers had to go around shouting, “Unclean, Unclean” but the tax collectors were bellowed at Jews, “Unclean, unclean.”

Tax collectors was the lowest of the low, with the possible exception of prostitutes. But we will get to them in just a moment.

Back to Jesus.

As we’ve watched, listened and followed him around we have seen that Jesus rarely does what is expected. He is full of surprises.

And the biggest surprise happens as he walks the shores the Sea of Galilee and comes across a reviled tax collector named Levi.

Levi (Matthew) sat at his booth to get border taxes from anyone than came from the north into Judea. Levi would

forcibly examine the goods coming in and then decide how much he wanted in taxes.

You know how the people would pay? They would spit on the ground and throw their money at him. Here you go you worthless piece of slime!

Then Jesus.

The way you can understand what is going on with Jesus is to watch what he does that is unexpected and weird. And verse 14 gives us that picture—

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him,

If you were a Jew—you would expect that he would say to the tax collector—HOW DARE YOU? How dare you turn on your people. How dare you rob from God's people. Woe to you and your whole house.

But instead Jesus says,

“Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

And he did.

And the crowd would gasp.

And immediately the people would stare in shock and wonder that this man from Nazareth would ask a tax collector—human dung to follow him.

What does this say about Jesus?

That he would want that man and all he had done follow him? Why would Jesus want to have tax collectors as a disciple.

Fishermen—fine.

But tax collectors.

They are:

Traitors

Swine

Untrustworthy

Detestable

Abhorrent

Offensive

There was no one more offensive that Jesus could have said, “Follow me.” to.

Why?

Because the tax collector was infected by the worst possible kind of sin—he was a traitor to his people and the God of Israel.

But Jesus calls Levi nonetheless.

If the crowd was shocked Levi must have been stunned. Levi would have thought that there was no way Jesus would want him. Because the Jews thought of him and his kind as—

Traitors
Swine
Untrustworthy
Detestable
Abhorrent
Offensive

Why should this Jew from Nazareth be any different? But when our Lord's eyes met Levi's those eyes of love and care and mercy and grace when they met his and Levi heard, "Follow me."

Levi got up and left everything without a backward glance.

Levi knew he was infected by sin. He had no delusions, he knew he was a sinner, no one had to convince him. Jesus when he offered life, it was easy to come and turn and follow him.

Levi might have thought that he was not good enough to follow Jesus. NOT TRUE.

Jesus did not make moral change a precondition of love and acceptance. He loved Levi as he was—traitor and all.

Jesus is still like that.

Have you ever thought you weren't good enough? That you don't measure up that you are so flawed, so broken, so messed up that Jesus would never want you. NOT TRUE.

- No one is so infected by sin that Jesus cannot heal.
- No one has to improve to be worthy of his love.
- No one is too far gone that they can't come to Jesus.

- No one is so unclean that Jesus cannot cleanse them.
- No one is so sinful that they cannot come to Jesus.

Maybe you are in this room—and you think all these people around me they seem like better people than I am. I could never fit in here. NOT TRUE.

Let me tell you a secret. We are all sinners. No better than this hated tax collector. We just clean up real well for Sunday morning. You are welcome here. You are wanted here. No one is too messed up for us. We are still a bit messed up we just follow Jesus. And I'm at the front of that line.

- Messed up? Join the club.
- Need help? We are all the same.
- Infected by sin? Aren't we all.
- Messy? We've all been there.

If Jesus welcomes tax collectors to follow him, he will welcome you too. Jesus is the friend of sinners. Jesus seeks out the:

Traitors
Swine
Untrustworthy
Detestable
Abhorrent
Offensive

And says, "Follow me."

And then he has a party. Levi invites Jesus over to his house to eat and be with all of his unsavory associates.

15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

Instead of a few unsavory characters hanging out with Jesus—a bunch came. For the Jew at the time this is the equivalent of that bar scene from Star Wars—who are all these bizarre aliens?

No upstanding Jew would be caught dead with that crowd. But there was Jesus right in the middle. Jesus friend of sinners.

Jesus loves calling and hanging out with what others consider the wrong kind of people. Here we are beginning to see the offensiveness of Jesus. We are beginning to see the some are attracted to Jesus and others are repelled from Jesus based on who follows him.

You see the tax collectors and sinners they KNEW they were infected by sin. Often those most aware of their sin are most ready to follow Jesus.

But not everyone sees things that way—

If tax collectors are infected and they know it—there is another group infected and they don't know it. We meet them now.

2.Scribes: Infected Unaware (Mark 2:16-17)

NOT everyone likes the fact that Jesus welcomes everyone.

16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Remember, I said the scribes were going to be troooouble for Jesus? From here the animosity and confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees are going to get real.

That man, Jesus was a friend of tax collectors & sinners.

Gasp.

How can the one who is the Son of God be with sinners? How can Daniel’s Son of Man—sent from the Ancient of Days call a tax collector?

The word Pharisee means ‘those who separate.’ They would separate themselves from anything or anyone they deemed unclean. It was good that they separated themselves from Greek philosophy and false gods—it was BAD that they separated themselves from people unlike them.

Where they separated themselves from Tax collectors and sinners—Jesus went over to their house and enjoyed himself at a party.

To dine with someone was to fellowship with them to accept them without asking them to clean themselves up.

Get the picture—here is Jesus eating and freely mixing with—

Drunks
Adulterers
Drug Addicts
Prostitutes
Thieves

And worst of all—Tax Collectors

Not just a few either. A lot! Jesus was in the wrong kind of house with the wrong kind of people.

The most shocking detail in this story is that Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners. He had with the repugnant, shocking people.

When we read that he ate with them—we don't think it is that big a deal. So what?

For them having a meal with someone was more than just sharing food. Inviting someone in your home made a statement about you. You are saying—I am equal with my guests. I am unified with my guests. I stand with my guests. I accept my guests.

Do you see why the scribes had trouble with this?

By his actions Jesus is saying:

I am equal with Tax Collectors & sinners
I am unified with Tax Collectors & sinners
I stand with Tax Collectors & sinners
I accept Tax Collectors & sinners

The scribes would not eat with tax collectors and sinners because they were better than tax collectors and sinners. The scribes would not even touch a tax collector or sinner—they were unclean!

The reason the scribes had trouble with Jesus is not because he associated with tax collectors and sinners but because he ate with tax collectors and sinners.

If this man accepts the dregs of society—what is wrong with him?

And Jesus answers them directly—why did he mix with the wrong kind of people? With the:

Drunks
Adulterers
Drug Addicts
Prostitutes
Thieves

Here's why,

17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

In other words, Doctors visit the sick not the healthy. Jesus came to remedy the affliction of sin.

His answer is clear but also ironic.

Why?

Are there any that are righteous?

“None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God.” Romans 3:10–11

Any righteous. No one, no, not one.

What about sinners?

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

If there are no righteous and all have sinned, what is Jesus getting at here? What does he mean when he says,

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

It is a question of self-awareness.

All are sinners, but Jesus is making it clear that he has come for those who KNOW they are infected. In other words, Jesus came for people who know they are sinners and NOT for those who think they are righteous.

The self-righteous are infected unaware.

There is a grave danger in false religion. It is more dangerous than out and out sin.

Why?

Because the flagrant sinners knows he is a—

Traitors
Swine
Untrustworthy
Detestable
Abhorrent
Offensive

But the religious sinners think they are—

Good
Worthy
Respectable
Okay
Ernest
Righteous

And they aren't.

Or to use the language of Jesus here—Jesus came to heal those who know they are sick and NOT those who think they are healthy.

There is not much in this world more deadly than being sick yet not knowing it. But self-righteousness is a disease adept at hiding. You can be infected and not know it at all.

That should scare you and I to life.

What does this mean?

As we watch Jesus, listen to Jesus and follow him around—what does this mean?

It means at least this— Like Huntington's you can be infected with self-righteousness and not know it.

This is why we need to watch, listen and follow Jesus around.

What does this mean?

Jesus is friend of sinner and foe of self-righteous.

Which are you?

We are all infected—the question is—do you know it?

Jesus friend of sinner—we have nothing to offer and everything to gain.

- *Infected and you know it—*

You know you have done wrong, you know you have not lived right. No one has to convince you that you are a sinner.

You might not think it, but that is the first part of understanding the gospel. If you know you are infected by sin you are nearly to Jesus.

You are most of the way.

You might feel too infected, too dirty by the stain of sin and Jesus says—“I've come to call the infected and the dirty those marked by the stain of sin.”

You are infected and you know it. Jesus came to call you to himself. He doesn't call you because you are good, because you are worthy, because you have potential, because you measure up.

No, he calls you because you know you are a sinner and you cannot save yourself.

This story—Mark—continues and as we watch Jesus, as we listen to Jesus, as we follow him around we are going to see that he is going to die like a sinner. He does this so that he can take the place of sinners—By hanging and dying he takes the punishment of any who come to him and say—I know I'm infected.

Save me.

He will. He says himself, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The only qualification to come to Jesus is that you know you are a sinner.

Even if you are a—

Traitor

Swine

Untrustworthy

Detestable

Abhorrent

Offensive

Jesus calls you to himself. Come.

There are those infected and they know it and there are others who are infected and they don't know it.

- *Infected and you don't know it*

This is much scarier. Why?

Because so often the most self-righteous are the most religious.

The scribes were good people who knew more theology than any of us in the room, but they were blind to themselves.

Empty religion can do that.

The self-righteous are sick and they don't know it. I want you to see that Jesus offers forgiveness to the self-righteous as well.

The sins of the self-righteous are more subtle.

What are some signs?

- You think you have something to offer others.
- You think you have something to offer the Lord.
- You compare yourself regularly with others.
- You cannot abide someone correcting you.
- You correct others much more.
- You are confident that you are rarely wrong.
- You know theology and think you know God.

- You listen only to those who agree with you.
- You take up causes as a way to divert yourself from yourself.
- You look down on others.
- You hold grudges.
- You foster bitterness.
- You are often misunderstood.

Notice, none of these things are as flagrant as adultery, drugs, theft or murder—but they are just as serious.

There are some of you in this room who are infected by self-righteousness and you don't know it. Some of you are not Christians and you think you are.

I hope you see yourself a sinner—because Jesus can do something with that.

There are those who are infected and know it, those who are infected and don't know it.

There is a third group—

- *Christians slowly improving but still infected*

And there are Christians that struggle with both sin and the sin of self-righteousness.

This is why we need each other and the Word of God. Packer compares the church to a hospital.

“The (Bible) fits, because we are all spiritually sick — sick through sin, which is a wasting and killing disease of the heart. The unconverted are sick unto death; those who

have come to know Christ and have been born again continue sick, but they are gradually getting better as the work of grace goes on in their lives.

The church, however, is a hospital in which nobody is completely well, and anyone can relapse at any time. Pastors no less than others are weakened by pressure from the world, the flesh, and the devil, with their lures of profit, pleasure, and pride, and...pastors must acknowledge that they the healers remain sick and wounded and therefore need to apply the medicines of Scripture to themselves as well as to the sheep whom they tend in Christ's name.

All Christians need Scripture truth as medicine for their souls at every stage, and the making and accepting of applications is the administering and swallowing of it.” J.I. Packer

May we Christians remind ourselves of what we already know—we’ve brought nothing to Jesus but the rags of our sin and failure.

He loves us not because we are loveable but because he has set his love upon us.

You might be convicted—good. It means you are fighting off the infection of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. He freely forgives.

He came not to call the righteous but the sinners.

We can also say, He came to call sinners to forgive them and declare them to be righteous. He is Jesus friend of sinner foe of self-righteous.

Take the infection of your sin to Jesus.

PRAY

[33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

[34] “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

[35] “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

[36] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:33–36