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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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## **Christ Alone Can Heal the Soul**

**Mark 2:13-17**

### A Parable of a Pandemic

Since approximately March of 2020, we have been experiencing what medical experts call a “pandemic.” I suppose I had not heard that word before in such a way that it made any impact on me. I had heard the word “epidemic” before and used it in sentences. But suddenly the word “pandemic” was came upon our consciousness by the rapid, worldwide spread of the coronavirus that started in one place. An epidemic represents a circumstance in which an outbreak of a disease in one geographic locality results in a sudden increase in cases of that disease in that one place. A pandemic occurs when that outbreak spreads widely over a wide geographical region, or even worldwide, affecting a sizeable portion of the population.

The word pandemic comes from two Greek words: pan + demos; pan (meaning all) and demos meaning people... literally all the people

Now I have no problem with the use of the word. But in actuality, when it comes to physical diseases, actual maladies, there has technically never been a pandemic in human history. There is no single disease which literally infects or affects ALL the people of the entire world...

Or is there??

In our text today, Jesus clearly likens sin to a disease, and his own ministry to the healing work of a physician. When Jesus visited

the house of Levi, a tax collector, and a huge number of tax collectors and sinners came that night to Levi's house and Jesus ate with them, the scribes who were Pharisees were outraged. They prided themselves in avoiding all contact with such defiled wicked people. Much of their religion was based on them avoiding the sins of such people – they didn't do this and didn't do that, and they stayed far away from people who did such wicked things... they QUARANTINED themselves from sinners lest they should somehow catch the contagion of their sins.

So, when Jesus violated this principle and dove right into the midst of a crowd of tax collectors and sinners, when he ate food with them and drank drink with them, when he reclined at table with them and conversed pleasantly with them, these religiously quarantined Pharisees were scandalized. Shocked. Stunned. And outraged. To them, it was clear proof that Jesus was not from God. For God is pure and holy and is far from all evil. He is close to the pure and the righteous and the holy... people like them.

Jesus addressed their accusation with a clear analogy:

***Mark 2:17 "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

So... sin is sickness, and Jesus is the doctor.

Okay, let's go back to the way I began my sermon – with a meditation on the word "pandemic." I said there has never been a true pandemic in the literal sense of the etymology... a physical disease, an actual malady that has swept through the entire population of the world. Perhaps the most famous, the black death, the bubonic plague, which ravaged three continents from 1346-1353, we read of whole towns being wiped off the face of the map by death... estimated range from 75-200 million dead. The 50 million dead of Europe represented as high as 60% of the population. SIXTY PERCENT! That

dwarfs any other tragedy in human history. But it is still not 100%.

There is only one true PAN-DEMIC, and that is sin.

The Bible tells us that the entire human race sinned in Adam:

***Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned***

All human beings are conceived in sin, born in sin, steeped in sin from infancy, and confirm their sins as soon as they understand right from wrong and the existence of a holy and good God who demands that they love him and serve him, and that they love and serve others. As soon as every single solitary human being understands right from wrong, they begin their evil career of sin. Listen to this clear description of a UNIVERSAL SIN DISEASE:

***Romans 3:10-12 There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.***

Now that, dear friends, is the language of a true PAN-demic... ALL the people, every single human being on the face of the earth is infected with a terrible disease called sin.

Puritan Ralph Venning, who pastored in London during a terrible outbreak of the Black Death in 1665, four years later wrote a treatise on sin called "The Plague of Plagues." He made it plain that sin was worse than any physical disease could ever be:

"Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love.... it is the upbraiding of his providence, the scoff of his promise, the reproach of his wisdom... it seeks to sit in God's place ruling over all God's works; what God has made beautiful sin universally makes ugly."

And it is a true **pandemic** because there is not a location on earth where human beings reside that is free from this plague. All over the earth, human beings are born in iniquity, grow up in fanatical and prideful commitment to self-interest, would seek to rule their own lives contrary to the Word of God, and spread their contagious pride and lust and covetous greed and murderous anger and filthy language wherever they go. This is the Plague of all Plagues... and it is the only true pandemic... far deadlier than all the plagues of history, it threatens humanity with not only physical death on earth but with eternal death in hell.

Now imagine living in a populous and influential town in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during the height of the Black Death. Imagine that you yourself have the tell-tale signs of the infection – painfully swollen lymph nodes, chills, headache, fever... a few hours later, it develops into tissue bleeding and intense abdominal pain. You stagger out into the street and see every member of your family looking just like you... so also all your neighbors... and as you stumble down the street, you see every tradesman and merchant slumped by his shop, with the same telltale signs all over their bodies. Suddenly you hear a call – summoning all the citizens to the town center. You make your way to the town center and you see the Prince, the Son of the King, standing straight and tall and strong. He is holding in his hand a flask. He cries aloud, “Hear ye, hear ye... all members of this noble town. You are all stricken with a dread disease and will shortly die if you are not soon healed. I have come with your cure... if you allow me to pour this elixir down your throat, you will be cured immediately! But this cure is only for those who know that they are sick!” Hope rises in your heart... you look around to your friends, and to your family members. You say, “Let’s go and be healed!” But one by one, they turn their faces away. And they all say, “I’m not sick... I’m fine!”

You are stunned. But you determine that you have no other choice. And you can’t imagine that the Prince, a kind and wise man, would be lying to the people. You join a small group of

obviously sick people, waiting your turn. One by one, those ahead of you open their mouths and the Prince pours the medicine down their throats. Immediately, they are strengthened... revived. They jump to their feet. Soon, their skin becomes ruddy and obviously healthy again. Now, at last, it is your turn. You open your mouth and the medicine flows in. You feel a surge of energy within you and you know – you truly know – that you have been healed!

The Prince then walks through the town holding aloft the flask. A small entourage of newly healed people follows in his train. He cries out “Here is the cure. You need only to come and drink and you will be healed.” But most of the people turn away, saying “I am not sick.” You speak to friends, neighbors, even beloved family members. But the disease seems to have affected their minds. They say, “I know I feel a little weak and have a few sores on my skin, but everyone has that. I’m not a bad as some other people I’ve seen! Besides, look... I can stand up! I can walk! I am not coughing much! I can pick up a pitcher of water and lift it high! I am FINE!”

Friends, I wonder if this is what the world looks like to the angels who watch the responses to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I especially wonder at some people who think they are good enough people to not need a Savior like Jesus.

This sermon flows from a text that addresses that very issue.

Last time, we saw Jesus’ amazing authority to forgive sins

Four friends lowered a paralyzed man on a mat in front of Jesus.

***Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."***

When Jesus’ enemies heard him say that, they thought in their hearts, “This man is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus knew their thoughts and said

***Mark 2:9-11 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup> "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."***

So... Jesus proved his greatest power... the power to forgive sins! In the language of the pandemic I have been describing, Jesus has the cure to the deadliest disease on planet earth – the disease of sin. He has the absolute power of God to forgive all our sins for all time.

But now, in this text, we see the only people he will forgive. In the language of the pandemic, the only people this Great Physician will heal – is those who **KNOW** that they are **SICK** with **SIN**.

Last time, the test case was a paralytic who rose and walked before their very eyes.

This time, the test case will be a tax collector named Levi – who we also know from his Greek name Matthew. Jesus' love for tax collectors and sinners – people who are steeped in sin – is clearly on display. By the end of this text, he will make it plain that the only people he can heal are those who see their disease.

## I. The Great Physician Calls a Sick Sinner

***Mark 2:13-14 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <sup>14</sup> As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.***

### A. Location: Out by the Seashore

1. The huge crowds were so overwhelming that almost no building was big enough to handle the throngs that demanded physical healings from Jesus
2. So again, Jesus is walking beside the Sea of Galilee
3. And again, a HUGE CROWD was following him

4. And again, his top priority was TEACHING

B. Note: the Primacy of the Word

1. We will see this again and again
2. All of Jesus' miracles addressed temporary needs—sickness, pain, hunger
3. But the ministry of the Word addressed the true issue—the state of their souls, the condition of their relationship with God

C. Meeting Levi the Tax Collector

1. **“As he walked along...”** Jesus is constantly moving from place to place
2. This gives a picture of the spiritual pilgrimage he calls each of us to
3. We can't stay where we are and be saved; we must GET UP and FOLLOW HIM

On the beach of Normandy, D-Day, June 6, 1944, in some of the coastline, the troops landed in sections of beach that were completely prepared to repel the invasion; every square inch of the beach had been pre-sighted and was under the constant assault of artillery and machine-gun fire; there was not a single safe place on that beach; if they stayed there by the water's edge, they would most certainly die

So also when it comes to following Jesus

As Jesus walks along spiritually past us, he calls on us to GET UP and FOLLOW HIM... **if you stay where you are, you will DIE!!!**

So he did with Levi son of Alphaeus

As he walked along he saw Levi sitting at the tax collector's booth

Jesus called him, as a master calls a disciple, as a king commands a subject: FOLLOW ME!

Instantly, Levi got up and followed him

4. Imagine what the crowd must have thought! Tax collectors were among the most despised people in the world

#### D. Tax Collectors

1. Roman conquest inevitably led to taxes; that was the ongoing plunder, the spoils of having a worldwide empire
2. The money flowed into to Roman coffers all over the Roman world, enriching Caesar and paying for further conquests
3. The actual collecting of the taxes was handled locally; Herod Antipas was responsible to Rome for a certain load of taxes every year; Herod recruited by selling tax collecting franchises to Jews willing to buy them
4. This was a lucrative business; the tax collectors were protected by the power of Rome—to touch them was to incur a Roman death sentence on your head, so they were inviolate
5. The tax collectors were required for a certain tax quota, and anything beyond that amount was theirs to keep
6. There were a whole array of taxes
  - a. The income tax amounted to about 1%
  - b. The land tax another 10% of all grain and 20% of all fruit and wine
  - c. Additional taxes were levied on the transport of goods, on large catches of fish, on the use of roads and bridges
  - d. All of these extra duties, taxes, tariffs, and levies were open to interpretation by the tax collectors and were ripe for abuse
  - e. Tax collectors could and did get filthy rich from this life
7. But the social cost was high
  - a. They were seen to be traitors to their neighbors and countrymen all over the world



- b. But especially among the Jews, who believed that the land had been given them permanently as Sons of Abraham, they often asked Rabbis this pointed question, which they will later ask Jesus:

***Mark 12:14-15 Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? <sup>15</sup> Should we pay or shouldn't we?"***

- c. Behind that question is THEOLOGY... the permanent gift of the Promised Land to Abraham
  - d. The Romans were seen to be ungodly interlopers, preventing the Jews from their full inheritance in the Promised Land
  - e. How much worse Jewish tax collectors, collaborating with this oppressive Roman regime
  - f. So, tax collectors were almost as despised as lepers; they were declared spiritually unclean, barred from attending synagogue
  - g. If you even touched a tax collector you were unclean for a time; if one visited your house, your house was unclean for a time
8. To make matters worse, in that tax collectors were barred from worship, many simply lived openly wicked lives—lives of sexual immorality and drunkenness
9. Every night, they would feast on the proceeds of the money they took from their countrymen—living high on the hog, washing away their cares with an abundance of wine, drowning the hatred they lived in with sex and booze and materialism
10. Levi... Son of Alphaeus... was a tax collector

#### E. What the Call from Jesus Meant

- 1. Jesus was clearly calling Levi, Matthew, to follow him as a disciple
- 2. It was the exact same pattern we saw in Mark 1 with Peter, Andrew, James, and John
- 3. So imagine the stunned reaction of the crowd

4. Everyone undoubtedly knew Levi... and hated him
5. But more importantly, Jesus knew Levi... because he knows ALL MEN
6. He knew how miserable Levi was, how ready to follow, ready to be set free from sin
7. And Levi undoubtedly knew who Jesus was... how could he not have heard of all these healings and the amazing teachings
8. Jesus was calling Levi to burn this bridge... to walk away from a life of financial ease and comfort; to become unemployed, to abandon earthly security
9. To follow Jesus meant that the world would become dead to him and he to the world
10. Levi certainly didn't understand all that yet... but he would
11. Levi lost the world and gained his soul
12. And that night, he celebrated his new relationship with Jesus the only way he knew how... a big banquet at his house

## II. The Great Physician Heals Many Sick Sinners

***Mark 2:15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.***

### A. The First Days of a New Convert

1. Immediately after one is converted, they often have the greatest evangelistic effect, because all their friends are as lost as they have been
2. All of Matthew's friends were in the tax collection business
3. That night, the party was at Matthew's house!!
4. Now, in the course of time, Matthew would be allowed by the Holy Spirit to write one of the four Gospels, thus his converts after his

death, for twenty centuries, would be far greater than this first night in his house

5. But here was his start!

#### B. “Sinners”

1. In addition, there were “sinners”... this is a title used by the normal Jewish population, led by the perspective of the scribes and Pharisees
2. Self-righteous people tend to divide the world into two categories: the good people and the bad people; the good people are moral, law-abiding, fine upstanding citizens, attending religious services, probably, good-looking, successful, not a drain on society... then there are the “bad people”... the “sinners”
3. The “sinners” were people who lived openly immoral lives; they had cast restraint to the wind; they were drunks, thieves, thugs, prostitutes, scoundrels, highway robbers, fun-loving folks whose motto was something like “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.”
4. Both the self-righteous and the sinners generally accepted the same view of religion: that it was for the “good people”... both the Pharisees and the sinners thought there could be no salvation for the sinners

#### C. A Revival Breaks Out

1. Jesus immersed himself in Matthew’s night-time feast, but undoubtedly he transformed it

C.T. Studd, the missionary to China, said “Some people want to live within the sound of a chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop a yard from the gate of hell.”

2. Jesus went to the tax collector feast that night... because the kind of people he came to save would be there in large numbers

3. A ray of sunlight is not polluted by a pile of manure; neither can Jesus' holy touch of a leper result in him catching the defiling disease; Jesus seizes the dinner and transforms it
4. His words were unlike anything anyone had ever heard before
5. He told stories that resonated with their souls; for the first time, these hopeless sinners saw a chance that their sins could be forgiven
6. Perhaps some of them wept, others looked at Jesus, the pure Son of God in amazement... instead of seeing judgment and rage and wrath, they saw compassion and love and forgiveness flowing from him like sunlight, like a rushing mountain stream of pure clear water
7. They didn't defile him, he saved them... he cleansed them by the word of God
8. And they followed him too

***Mark 2:15 there were many who followed him.***

9. The Great Physician was healing their souls, speaking the words they needed to hear the most—"Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven. And your sins are forgiven."

### III. The Great Physician Accused by the Self-Righteous

***Mark 2:16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"***

#### A. The Teachers of the Law and Pharisees

1. We see these people again and again
2. We get utterly weary of them
3. They were the self-righteous religionists of the day
4. They believed that they were righteous, healthy, secure
5. They had never murdered anyone physically, so they were holy

6. They have never committed adultery physically, so they were holy
7. They followed all the temple rules and regulations; they made all the religious sacrifices and attended all the convocations and followed all the moral laws of Moses
8. They were the chosen race, the sons of Abraham; they pored over the words of Moses and the Prophets, and thought they had never broken a single commandment from their youth
9. Furthermore, they isolated themselves from people like this
10. They undoubtedly refused to go inside Matthew's house
11. They were the HEALTHY spiritually, so they believed; they had no need of a physician from an illness they absolutely did not think they had

#### B. Grumbling Against Jesus

1. In their mind, by Jesus EATING and DRINKING with tax collectors and sinners, he was every bit as defiled as they were
2. Amazingly, self-righteous people not only hate the sinners, they also hate the only truly righteous man that has ever lived
3. Why? Because he exposed their hypocrisy... he testified against them that what they did was evil; that they had the contagion of the pandemic actually WORSE than anyone else
4. They would settle into a powerful pattern of opposition to Jesus

#### IV. The Great Physician Declares Who He Will Heal

***Mark 2:17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

#### A. Vital Teaching!

1. Jesus here gives us permission to see all his physical miracles as acted out parables of the true healing work

2. Healing sinners of sin by calling them to repent of their sins and believe the gospel is the true eternal healing; the only one that really lasts, the only one that really mattered
  3. Sin is the ultimate pandemic... the plague of all plagues
  4. Jesus is the only physician with the cure to the true ailment of the human condition... the sickness of sin
  5. This “therapeutic view” of salvation is essential to how I understand some of the deepest issues in theology... like “free will” vs. “sovereign grace”
  6. I believe that all conversions are in some sense a work of HEALING... of THERAPY; the eye was created by God to SEE LIGHT, to give a true view of the world and its radiant colors to the mind; when someone is blind, it is a clear violation of God’s original purpose for that exquisite organ; when Jesus healed a blind eye, then the person’s sight was restored and they saw as God intended
  7. In the same way, our heart was made to APPRAISE all things and be ATTRACTED TO or REPULSED FROM all things as God is... attracted to good, repulsed from evil; when the heart is healthy, it will naturally be attracted to God, the highest good, the purest light, the most beautiful being in the universe; it is a sick, diseased heart that hates God and hates Christ; so when God takes out the heart of stone and gives us the heart of flesh, he is merely healing the sick, sin-twisted heart to love what is the most perfectly lovely being in the Universe—God himself; so also when God heals the heart, that heart will be drawn in love to other people and yearn to bless them as Christ does; this is HEALING; so also when God heals the heart, it hates sin—all sin—all evil, all darkness... it hates as God does
  8. Salvation is the HEALING of the heart
- B. Jesus Did NOT COME to HEAL the Self-Righteous
1. Heathy people have no need for a physician

2. They don't come to a doctor; imagine a person managing to get a consultation with a busy specialist, the greatest heart doctor in the world; he is world renowned and extremely difficult to get to; this person has an influential friend who pulls strings and gets him the session with the cardiologist; the cardiologist is flown in from his home city, comes to the clinic in that person's city; they sit down, and the cardiologist says, "Tell me what's going on? What are your symptoms? How long have you been experiencing pain in your chest?" And the man says, "Oh, I have no symptoms at all? I have no pain at all. I am in fine condition, fit, with great cardio endurance. As far as I know, I am perfectly healthy in my body, and especially my heart." That makes absolutely no sense at all!
3. IT IS NOT THE HEALTHY WHO NEED A DOCTOR...
4. And the second devastating statement... "I have NOT COME to call the righteous..."
5. Jesus came... from heaven to earth... he came down, entered the world of suffering and sin and death... but he did not come because the world was FINE before he got there
6. He did NOT come for people who think they don't need a Savior
7. Essential to everyone salvation by Jesus Christ is this... admit that your heart is SICK and TWISTED with sin

***Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?***

He cannot do anything for these self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who consider themselves healthy spiritually, pure, free from sin

C. Who Jesus DID Come to Heal

***Mark 2:17 Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

1. Ask the Lord to show you the depths of your sins
2. Cry out against yourself
3. Declare to Jesus that you are prideful, lustful, covetous, selfish

4. Acknowledge patterns of anger that would be murderous if not restrained by your training or by fear of arrest
5. Admit that every natural bent of your life is to feed your stomach and your pleasures, to have people honor you and elevate you, to have your body pleased and your ego stroked
6. Admit that you do not love God with every fiber of your being... loving him above all else
7. Admit with Paul the depths of the sin problem:

***Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.***

***Romans 7:18-21 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. <sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.***

#### D. Called to Repentance

***Luke 5:31-32 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."***

1. The problem is much worse than a physical disease
2. Often there is no fault in a sick person... they did nothing to cause the sickness
3. But sin is willful rebellion against Almighty God
4. Sin is dark, twisted sickness that we willingly indulge in
5. Jesus is calling on sinners to repent... to hate the sin, to grieve over it, to turn away from it



6. Jesus is saying he will pay the penalty for our sins, and when he did, he cried out in the agony of the cross; that's what our sins rightly deserved
7. To repent is to cry out against ourselves, to know we don't deserve to lift our eyes to heaven; to beat our breasts and cry out against ourselves, "What a wretched person I am! Who will save me from this sin?"
8. It is to resolve to hate sin and grieve over it and fight against it the rest of our lives by the power of the Spirit
9. This is the person Jesus heals... and he DOES HEAL!
10. With the joy of Levi and all his tax collector friends, we can leap for joy knowing that the holy Judge of all the Earth has looked upon us and declared our sins forgiven; the Great Physician has looked on our corrupt, twisted, sin-sick hearts, and when he is done with them, they will be perfectly healed... completely conformed to his heart!

## V. The Great Physician Calls Each of Us

### A. Essential to our Salvation: Admit Your Heart is Desperately Sick

1. The only person Jesus cannot heal is the one who says he needs no healing
2. This is the normative view... "I am basically a good person..."
3. NO! Forsake that view!
4. Jesus is calling us all to follow him out of our dark pit of sin into healing, into transformation, into a whole new life

### B. See Yourself in this Text!

1. We are sin-sick, unable to heal ourselves
2. We need the miracle-worker, the healer of sin-sick hearts

### C. Understand the Healing of Souls is Both Instantaneous and Gradual

1. Unlike Jesus' healing of the body, the full healing of the soul takes a lifetime
2. Instantly Jesus can bring our dead souls to life... raised from the death of sin to new life in Christ
3. But then, the rest of our lives, he continues his therapeutic work in our souls... changing how we think about everything, what we love and what we hate, then... how we live... what we do or don't do
4. This new life is a life of continual healing by the Great Physician
5. And it will culminate in glory... perfect healing in heaven for all eternity