

Leading Our Friends to Jesus Mark 2:1-17

A few months ago on twitter, FakeJDGreear said, “Hey tonymerida: your church should host a bring-a-friend event. Call it *Imago Dei Amigo Day*.” That’s a good idea, only we want every day to be “bring a friend day.”

I want to talk to about leading our friends to Jesus. When people ask what is your **plan for reaching people?** It’s pretty simple. While we will do some events to reach people, the regular strategy is very simple: *befriending people and pointing them to Jesus*.

This is how everyone gets involved in the mission. Keller: “The church is often like a football stadium where 22 people need a rest & thousands of people need exercise.” This shouldn't be the case since everyone can/should make friends and point them to Jesus.

In **Mark 2** we see the Savior in Capernaum (a very small town, where Jesus lived, and where he did a lot of ministry). In five compact stories, Mark puts Jesus’ authority and transforming grace on display, as he changes lives.

Jesus is the hero in these five stories.

Big Idea: Lead your friends to Jesus **because** Jesus changes lives.

What’s going on in this section?

This section shows why Jesus has been called “the man you can’t ignore.” That’s a good description of what’s happening. Some believe, some don’t, but no one ignores him.

Commentators have referred to 2:1-3:6, as “controversy dialogues” because here, Jesus meets his critics. Let me show you these controversies briefly...

- **Forgiveness of Sins (2:1-12)** – A claim of Deity
- **Fellowshipping with the Unclean (2:13-17)**

- **Fasting (2:18-22)** – A claim to be the bridegroom (they would have understood that as Jesus being the Husband of the people of Israel, that is Yahweh)
- **Working on the Sabbath (2:23-28)**– He claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath
- **Healing: Healing on the Sabbath (3:1-6)**

So we see five pictures of Jesus:

- **Jesus: Forgiver of Sinners;**
- **Jesus: Friend of Sinners;**
- **Jesus: The Bridegroom;**
- **Jesus: Lord of the Sabbath;**
- **Jesus: The Great Physician**

Consequently, some loved Jesus, but some wanted to “**destroy him**” (3:6). One thing is for sure: *no one ignored him.*

Do you know him as forgiver? As the friend of sinners? As the bridegroom? As Lord? As the Great Physician? Do your friends?

The nations need to know this Jesus.

For our purposes, I want to look at two of stories. Let’s just walk through them and draw some application...

Lead Your Friends to Jesus because...

#1: Jesus Forgives Sinners (2:1-12)

This first story is sort of like a church. It is a corporate gathering where preaching is taking place. Perhaps 75 people could fit in there. Others were probably standing outside. So, it’s like a small church, or like a **big growth group ... only Jesus shows up! That would be a great growth group experience! “Hey we have a guest! Great? Who is he? Jesus... “I think he should teach.”**

And actually, this house became a house-church, according to tradition.

What Prompts the Controversy (1-5)

1: Jesus is at home (probably at the home of one of the disciples, Peter, presumably). Peter and his family probably lived there. Presently, a church built a goofy **looking space-ship of a thing over it.** (You can see a video of it here: <http://tonymerida.net/resources/videos/>)

2: The house is full! But the atmosphere was intense. Imagine it! The house is packed, the atmosphere is electric – **like a Duke game, only it’s Jesus not the devil.** (capernaum crazies)

And Jesus is “**preaching the word.**” His teaching is unlike everyone else’s! You can imagine workers, moms, dads, kids, peaking through the windows, trying to find a seat... He is preaching about the kingdom of God and the need to repent. Today, people go crazy over certain preachers - please, Jesus Christ is teaching the Bible!

3-4: Four men bring their friend or perhaps a relative of theirs to Jesus. They obviously love this man. They believe that Jesus can change him.

They remove the roof! (I wonder what Peter’s family thought of this?). The guys pulled back the straw and mud, made a hole and lowered the man in the presence of Jesus. **Don't do this at a growth group... or EMMS!**

Imagine the guy being lowered (demonstrate)... That's letting your request be known...

5: Jesus saw “**their faith.**” The reference is definitely to the four men, but might have also included the paralyzed man. Jesus responds to the faith of the one giving a petition to Jesus on behalf of another in several places.

Jesus announces, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**”

This is somewhat **surprising**, since you would think Jesus would just say, “Son, stand up, your faith has made you well.”

But Jesus goes deeper, to the issue of forgiveness. It has led some to wonder if sin was the reason this man was a paralytic. We can’t know for sure. We know in Scripture sin is not

always the reason for a particular physical problem, but sometimes it is.

But what you should notice right now, is that your greatest need is not physical. Your greatest need is having your sins forgiven. Your greatest need is not getting date; or a job, or a diploma – what good is all of that apart from forgiveness? It is not that he is unconcern with your physical condition. (he is) but that's not all...

Jesus' Critics (6-7)

6-7: The Scribes charge Jesus, with what he will eventually be charged with at the end of his life: **blasphemy**. The charge him with this because they know **only God can forgive sins**.

They were actually right! They were only misguided in their assessment: **God incarnate**. Notice, “**this fellow**” or “**this man**.”

Ultimately this charge will be the charge for which he is condemned.

The Pharisees *missed the hour of visitation*. The physician who heals souls was there and they rejected him.

Jesus' Response to the Critics (8-11)

8b: “Why do you question these things in your hearts?”

Amazingly, Jesus perceives what is in their hearts (“within themselves”). *Jesus knows what is within us*.

9: “Which is easier to say?...” We would think, “it’s easier to say something that is invisible, forgiveness, then make someone physically well.” But no. **Jesus is more than a miracle worker**.

Others were miracle workers in the OT. But none of them could pronounce final forgiveness; that was only God alone. Only God could send away sins! This is his response to the charge of blasphemy. He’s saying, I’m not blaspheming. I’m God. That’s why I can say, “you are forgiven.”

10: Jesus says that he has “the authority to forgive sins.” This is a clear statement of deity.

11: Look at this scene. He came lying on a mat; he left carrying the mat! Can you imagine the expression of those at his home?

Why did Jesus do the physical healing since the bigger need was forgiveness?

- “To say, I’ll do the healing to show I can do the forgiving.”
- A picture of the kingdom of God (healings were previews)
- A picture of the scapegoat – day of atonement
- A picture of mercy

The Response of the People (12)

- The Paralytic: “Immediately” – Jesus changes us instantly
- The People: Amazement & Glory to God (singing Psalm 103:1-3?)
- The Religious Leaders: They hate it!
 - "What did you think of his Hebrew?"
 - "Well, he wasn't dressed very nice."
 - I heard he had a tattoo that said King of Kings."
 - "I think he was spotted at Subway eating a ham sandwich."

Meanwhile the parlayed guy is partying! I imagine him dancing, running, walking, entering a 5 K.

Application:

A: Come to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Forgiveness from God is your **greatest need**, and this forgiveness is only possible through Jesus Christ.

*Listen, you are not going to find another religion that forgives your sins. It is about obeying someone's **ridiculous list of rules** in effort of earning God's love.*

- And that greatest need is met **immediately**, if one responds in repentance and faith in Christ.

- “How can sin be rightly remitted unless the very One against whom one has sinned grants the pardon?” (Irenaeus). Our sin is against God, and only God can forgive them. Even though David sinned against Bathsheba, he ultimately sinned against God, “Against you and you only have I sinned.”
- And he forgives! In Christ, we are clean! But some of you are filthy, but Jesus forgives!
- **You are not hiding your sin**; Jesus knows the heart. So come clean.

B: If you are a Christ-follower, bring your friends to corporate gatherings to meet Jesus and experience his forgiveness: Sundays, growth groups, etc. There is something to learn from these four men, since Jesus commends them for their faith.

Billy Graham Crusades: the majority of converts were brought by a friend. Survey: Who or what brought you to Christ and/or church? Friend or Relative 75-90%.

What are you willing to do to bring your friend to Jesus? They will make excuses. Bring them.

Rainer, Millennials, They are highly relational and connected more than past generations. 30% of their whole life will be spent on a computer. But it's more than computer relationships, it's relationships in general, including family.

Rainer says, “Unleash the simple power of inviting.... Millennials as a whole are social creatures... Unlike previous unchurched generations, they don't think of the church with suspicion or doubt. For better or worse, they don't really think much about churches at all.”

○1930-1960's: Crusade Evangelism

○1960's-1990's: Visitation Evangelism

○1990-Present: Network Evangelism

It was “their faith” – the four men. Jesus commended these four men because they acted in faith. Jesus responds to faith. **What did they do?**

They Did Something Difficult. They got a cot, some rope, and lowered a man through a roof! It was dangerous!

Bringing people to Jesus will always be difficult. Invite people to church, and bringing them to church will be difficult. Love sacrifices; faith risks.

We are considering this right now, in looking for space. What is the best place for people to meet Jesus?

My experience, Stephen Brown...

Bring a Muffin, smile, buy lunch, a Bible with your name...

How long has it been since you've invited someone to a corporate gathering like this where the Gospel is proclaimed?

There will always be an obstacle!

- **Last year in Boston – When did you become a Christian? I'm not. I'm deciding. Some friends had been bringing her.**
- **Saddleback and Redeemer. A friendship evangelism culture. Harvey in Reno.**

Be their friend regardless of their response to Jesus. Keep loving and serving them.

#2: Jesus Befriends Sinners (2:13-17)

HE is not a friend of sin. He does not condone sin. Jesus was separated from sin, but not isolated from sinners. He befriended them and changed them.

In this story of the tax collector, we see the grace of Jesus, especially when you consider **Levi's genes**. This is a "scandal of grace."

Do you spend time with people who don't know Jesus, other than on foreign soil? Jesus is out among people.

We don't know if this was Matthew, but he appears to be based on Matthew's Gospel.

"His name means "gift of God." The one who had been a thief will now receive a gift from God and become a gift of God to the people he had taken advantage of. What a transformation!" -Akin

13: Beside the sea – most of the sea narratives are a call to discipleship.

14: Levi's Call

- "Follow me." The same thing said to the four fishermen. **Levi had a lot of money but not a lot of friends.** Jesus comes to him.
- **Jesus called four fishermen, and the one who taxed them!** What a picture of redemption.

Jesus comes to seek and save the lost. Levi fit that bill. He was among the "chief of sinners." He falls right in with people like *Mary Magdalene, who had seven demons before meeting Jesus.*

He was a despised man. That's because he took up taxes for the Roman oppressors. They were notorious for taking additional money as well. He was there in Capernaum taking up taxes, and surely fish was one of the commodities that were taxed.

Akin notes the following about tax collectors:

"Tax-collectors were notorious in that day and hated by the Jewish people as traitors and abusers of their own flesh and blood. They were a mafia like organization in the first century that exploited others."

(Ray in NY, "forget about it" had a famous mafia guy in to share his testimony, and the place was full. He said one of the guys was using a name "Mendez" – he didn't look like no Mendez – turned out he was Italian not Spanish. And he asked, "You're not wearing a wire are you?")

Tax collectors... (Akin)

- "They served Rome, the Gentile occupying power of Israel.
- They were dishonest IRS agents who overcharged the people for their own profit.
- The Jewish writings known as the Mishnah and Talmud set them beside thieves and murderers they were so despised and loathed.
- They were expelled and banned from the synagogue.
- They were an embarrassment and disgrace to their families.
- The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean.
- Jews could lie to a tax collector without impunity.
- With money as his god, Levi was a "social leper" who was spiritually bankrupt having sold his soul to sin and self. His was a soul in need of a touch from Jesus."

But Jesus calls him! And Levi follows him...

15: What Prompts the Controversy

After he follows Jesus, he invites his friends to a social gathering at his home to meet Jesus. Read and **note Luke 5:29**.

The context implies that Levi arranged a banquet to celebrate his call to discipleship." (Guelich).

Jesus is at a banquet, a dinner, a party, with some controversial figures.

Table Fellowship

In the ancient Near East, to have a fellowship meal with someone meant that you accepted them in your company. It was a **boundary marker**. It was more than just nourishment. It symbolized friendship, intimacy and unity.

Meals were also ways to pursue reconciliation.

Here the basis for such acceptance appears to be forgiveness." (Witherington)."

Levi is saying "what brings us all together, is that we are great sinners, but Christ is a great Savior" to quote John Newton.

“Among the Jews (in particular) it was an unheard-of thing for a rabbi or any other religious leader to lower himself by staying at the house of a ‘publican.’” (Geldenhuys).

This story reminds us of Zacchaeus. Jesus went to his home...

“many tax collectors” and “sinners.”

- Zacchaeus may have been there, and came to faith later. A little man with a big change (Luke 19).
- **“sinners”** includes other notable sinners, such as harlots.

This group is not the ritually unclean, the poor, downtrodden. Jesus is with the socially immoral. It’s a banquet with those who were bad to the bone. It’s a scandal. It’s scandalous grace.

Those who avoid tax collectors and sinners are like Pharisees; those who dine with them are like Jesus.

This is not uncommon. God changed the most unlikely of people: like Rahab the prostitute, who is in the lineage of Jesus.

Excursus: Jesus came eating and drinking

I’ve been reading two books on food. One is called *The History of the world in Six Drinks* and Chester’s *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community and Mission Around the Table*. The latter is fantastic. It is basically an exposition of all the meals that Jesus has in Luke’s gospel, which are astonishingly everywhere in Luke’s gospel.

Chester asks the question, **“How would you complete this sentence: The Son of Man came ...?”** or **“We should ...”** He says the NT completes this sentence with three answers: (1) **“to serve not be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (2) **to seek and save the lost, and (3) has come eating and drinking. (Luke 7:34)**

The first two describe **“why”** Jesus came, and the third explains **“how”** he came – his method. And Jesus did it so

much that they called him a “glutton and drunkard.” He was so in to it, they accused him of excess.

His mission strategy was a long meal, stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine.

Chester

Luke's gospel – notice the frequency

- Luke 5 – Levi and tax collectors and sinners
- Luke 7 – “One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table...” he is then anointed with ointment
- Luke 9 – Feeds the 5,000
- Luke 10 – eats at the home of Mary and Martha
- Luke 11 – “A Pharisee asked him to dine with him...” he proceeds to rebuke the Pharisees
- Luke 14 – Jesus is at a meal when he urges us to invite the poor to our meals
- Luke 15 – Story of the Prodigal Son (with Pharisees and tax collectors as the audience)
- Luke 19 – Jesus invites himself to Zaccheus’ house! “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner”
- Luke 22 – The Last Supper
- Luke 24 – The risen Christ has a meal with two disciples at Emmaus, and then later eats fish with his disciples in Jerusalem
- This is only references to meals; numerous other references to food abound also...

“In Luke’s gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal” (Robert Karris, *Eating Your Way through Luke’s Gospel*).

In the ministry of Jesus, meals are place of **grace, **community** and **mission**. I want to encourage you to make your table a place for grace, community and mission.**

Back to Mark 2...

16: The Critics' Question

- “Why does he eat with sinners and tax collectors?”
- How could Jesus, a godly man, eat with **mafia leaders**, harlots, cheats, swindlers, and others?

17: Jesus responds to the critics.

- A: “I came for the sick, not the well”
- B: “I came to call the sinners not the righteous”
- I take both to mean, “the **so-called well**” or the “so-called righteous,” “the **self-righteous.**” The group that was questioning him.
- “call” – it is a summons to repentance.

Notice that they did not repent before he had a meal with them. He fellowshiped with them, befriended them, and then called them to repentance.

We like to reverse this in the church culture. We only eat with the upright. He didn't require repentance in advance before spending time with sinners and tax collectors, and neither should we.

Another Meal

I think the meal of Jesus with people is also a foreshadowing of the **not yet dimension of the kingdom of God.** Just as the healings are **previews** of the coming healing in the new heavens and earth; there will be a **better banquet with sinners who** have repented from every tribe and tongue.

“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.”
(Matt 8:11-12; Luke 13:29)

Isaiah says, we will have rich food and well aged wine (Is. 25:6); Revelation shows us a picture (ch. 19).

When you have a barbecue and invite people over to show them grace, and help them meet Jesus, you are acting out the values of the kingdom.

Our parents (Genesis) ate of forbidden fruit and caused separation, Jesus has come to reconcile us to God, where we can eat and drink with him in the new garden.

Applications:

A: Levi's calling reminds us that Jesus can change anyone.
Look who he starts with!

- Jesus is handing out party invitations and you are invited.

“When Jesus eats with Levi, the message is clear: Jesus has come for losers, people in the margins, people who've made a mess of their lives, people who are ordinary. Jesus has come for you. The only people left out are those who think they don't need God: the self-righteous and the self-important. Sadly, that includes many people.” (Chester).

B. Levi's banquet reminds us to intentionally invite friends to our home or some other social gathering to meet Jesus.

- Meals are powerful. They turn strangers into friends.
- They represent friendship, community and welcome.
- “I don't want to reduce church and mission to meals, but I do want to argue that meals should be an integral and significant part of our shared life” (Chester).
- “If you share a meal three or four times a week and you have a passion for Jesus, then you will be building up the Christian community and reaching out in mission.” (Chester).

Befriend unbelievers. Let me describe the process...

- **Be Friendly**
- **Make Friends.** We can't do our work of pointing people to Jesus if we are not with them. One reason we don't have a gazillion things going on at IDC, is that I've seen a church schedule be so packed that you have no time for table fellowship and outreach.
- **Choose to be where people are.** Be at the "third places" where people hang out.

- Don't be a "weird Christian." "Now I want to talk to you about the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Here is a Testa-mint, now listen." No! Be genuine. Talk about grace. Tell your story.
- Ask questions about them.
- Look for common interests. "frangelism" is a term Fred Luter used to describe this idea ... inviting friends to watch boxing. Invite them over or out
- Counter their stereotypes gently.
- Be Prepared Answer their Questions
- Serve them

Patience and Grace and Wisdom. That's how God has treated us.

Questions:

- **Would you pray that God would use you to lead a friend to Jesus this year? I mean, let's live this! For real.**

From the Resurgence Blog

We met in the elevator of our condo building. Instead of the classic stare down at the ground and avoid eye contact bit, I said hello and introduced myself. I asked him a few non-awkward, basic questions. How long have you lived here? Do you like it? Have you met any cool people?

The following week, I saw him in the lobby, and we picked up the conversation with a longer discussion revolving around the Seattle Mariners and their dim prospects for the year. I checked again to see if he was up for talking more, "If you want to watch a game at Sport, [the appropriately-named Seattle sports pub,] let me know." He accepted, we figured out a good date and time and within a few weeks, we were grabbing a bite and watching a game together. It wasn't long before he found out I was a Christian, went to church, and loved Jesus. He said to me, "Wow, my stereotype of Christians has been blown away. You're normal. You like good food and drink, you love your city and don't come off as a judgmental jerk." I soon invited him to church, where he heard the gospel preached powerfully. He became a Christian and got involved in Community Groups, praise God.

Sounds a lot like the ministry of Jesus. He came eating and drinking.

So, Who's coming over for dinner this week?

So, Who are you inviting/bringing next week?

Remember that what you are doing is a picture of the coming kingdom of God.