

### **Three Reasons to Rejoice in Christ Your Savior**

**1** <sup>40</sup>A man with leprosy came up to him, kneeling down before him and begging him, *If you are willing, you can make me clean.* <sup>41</sup>Being moved with compassion, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, *I am willing; be made clean.* <sup>42</sup>Immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup>Immediately [Jesus] sent him away, sternly charging him, <sup>44</sup>See that you say nothing about this to anyone; rather, go and show yourself to the priest, and offer the sacrifices Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them. <sup>45</sup>But he went away and began to proclaim what had happened and to spread the news everywhere. As a result, Jesus could no longer openly enter into a city; rather, he was forced to stay out in desolate places; but, [nevertheless,] they came to him from every direction.

**2** After several days, when he had again entered Capernaum, people heard that he was in the house. <sup>2</sup>So many gathered [to that place] that there was no longer any room, not even at the door; and he spoke the word to them. <sup>3</sup>Then there came some men, bringing to him a man suffering from palsy, carried by four of them. <sup>4</sup>Being unable to get near him because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above [Jesus]. When they had broken it open, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. <sup>5</sup>Upon seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, *Son, your sins are forgiven.* <sup>6</sup>Now some of the scribes were sitting there, reasoning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup>Why does this man speak like this? He is speaking blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone? <sup>8</sup>Jesus, immediately perceiving in his spirit that this is what they were thinking to themselves, said to them, *Why do you think such things in your hearts?* <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, *Your sins are forgiven;* or to say, *Get up, pick up your mat, and walk?* <sup>10</sup>But in order 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, pick up your mat, and go home.* <sup>12</sup>And [the man] got up, immediately picked up the mat, and went out in the presence of them all. As a result, they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, *We never saw anything like this.*

<sup>13</sup>Again [Jesus] went out by the seashore; and a great crowd came to him, and he taught them. <sup>14</sup>As he passed by, he saw Levi the [son] of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth, and he said to him, *Follow me.* He got up and followed him. <sup>15</sup>While he was having dinner at [Levi's] house, many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup>Now the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, [Why does] he eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? <sup>17</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to them, *Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, only those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*

<sup>18</sup>Now [at a time when] John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some men came and asked [Jesus], *Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?* <sup>19</sup>Jesus said to them, *Can the guests of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.* <sup>20</sup>But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then on that day they will fast. <sup>21</sup>No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup>And no man puts new wine into old wineskins; else the

*wine will burst the skins, and the wine and the skins will be ruined. On the contrary, they put new wine into fresh wineskins.* (Mk. 1:40-2:22)

## **Introduction**

Did you hear about the party they had down at the local restaurant the other day? What a bash! And did you hear who was there?

I sure did! I even heard he was the life of the party! And he claims to be such a religious man!

I can't believe it. I never heard of such a thing! What was he doing there? What is he trying to prove?

I don't know. Why don't we ask him?

Jesus, may we have a word with you? Jesus, we would like to know what you were doing at that party down at the local restaurant the other day. Shouldn't a man in your position be setting a better example? I mean, what kind of a message are you sending? Are you sure you want to identify Christianity with joy and laughter and celebration?

Jesus responds, "Let me answer your question with a little parable: When you attend a wedding reception and the bridegroom arrives, is it time for mourning or celebration? Celebration, of course! In the same way, when I'm present it should be the occasion of joy in the lives of my people."

As we come to this next passage in the Gospel of Mark, let us consider Three Reasons to Rejoice in Christ Our Savior.

### **I. Rejoice in Christ Your Savior, Because of His Compassion for You (Mk. 1:40-45)**

While He was visiting one of the cities of Galilee, Jesus is accosted by a leper— Luke describes him as "*a man full of leprosy*" (Lk. 5:12.) The commentator, William Hendriksen, gives the following description of the affects of leprosy:

... leprosy generally begins with pain in certain areas of the body. Numbness follows. Soon the skin in such spots loses its original color. It gets to be thick, glossy, and scaly ... As the disease progresses, the thickened spots become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch, with deep furrows between the swellings, so that the face of the afflicted individual begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers drop off or are absorbed; toes are affected similarly. Eyebrows and eyelashes fall out. By this time one can *see* that the person in this pitiable condition is a leper ... One can even *smell* it, for the leper emits a very

unpleasant odor. Moreover, in view of the fact that the disease-producing agent frequently also attacks the larynx, the leper's voice acquires a grating quality. His throat becomes hoarse, and you can now not only feel, see, and smell the leper, but you can hear his rasping voice. (*The Gospel of Matthew*, William Hendriksen, p.388)

Now it must be noted that the "leprosy" referred to in both the Old and New Testaments is not to be equated with the disease now known as *Hansen's Disease*. The Scriptures are speaking of some type of undefined skin disease. However, in its most severe form, that skin disease would no doubt display symptoms similar to *Hansen's Disease* as it is described above.

Consider the significance of leprosy as it is presented in the Scriptures. Scripture identifies this disease as "*the plague of leprosy*" (Lev. 13:2.) "Leprosy is never said to be healed in Scripture, always cleansed" (*The New Bible Commentary*, p. 811.) The one who contracted leprosy was pronounced "unclean" by the priest (Lev. 13:3.) The leper was obligated to wear torn clothes and leave his hair unkempt as he cried out, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev. 13:45.) Note that the apparel described in Leviticus 13:45 was the apparel—and behavior—of mourning and contrition. When Aaron's sons were consumed by the LORD's fire for offering an unauthorized sacrifice, Moses instructs Aaron not to engage in the normal routine of mourning, which included the tearing of one's clothing:

*Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes ... But your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the LORD has destroyed by fire."* (Lev. 10:6)

During the time of his leprosy, the leper had to remain outside the camp (Lev. 13:46.) He was banished from the presence of God and His people. If, by the grace of God, the leper was restored to wholeness, he had to offer a sin offering before rejoining the congregation (Lev. 14:19-20.)

The point being made is that during the Old Testament era, God employed the disease of leprosy as a physical and visible demonstration of the corruption and pollution of sin, the spiritual "disease" that devastates every man's soul and life and that renders us all unclean before a holy God. Anyone of us could justly be subjected to the physical disease of leprosy, because in Scripture leprosy symbolizes the moral "disease" of sin that pollutes us all: "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*" (Isa. 53:6a.)

Consider how the Lord Jesus responds to this man who is "*full of leprosy.*" Jesus is "*moved with compassion.*" If we came into contact with a man in the later stages of leprosy, how would we react to him? We would be repelled by him—repelled by the sight, the smell, the hideousness of his appearance and condition. Now we may better understand how God in His holiness naturally reacts to our moral

“leprosy” of heart and life; as the prophet Habakkuk declares of the LORD, *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong”* (Hab. 1:13a.) Yet this same God, in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, is moved with compassion towards that leprous man, and towards us. This is how God loved the world: He sent His Son into the midst of the “leper colony” of this fallen sinful world; He is willing to receive any of us “lepers” who come to Him for cleansing and new life.

Jesus *“stretched out His hand, and touched him.”* Jesus came into personal contact with this leprous man; He performed a “hands on” ministry. His touching of the leper was foretelling and demonstrating His identification with us in our sinful condition: *“Him [Christ] who knew no sin [i.e.; Christ had absolutely no personal acquaintance with sin] he [God the Father] made to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor. 5:21.)

Look closely at what this ministry did to Jesus. The leper’s disobedience (in proclaiming to everyone the miraculous healing he received) forced Jesus out of the community and into the wilderness; in effect, Jesus exchanged places with the leper (Mk. 1:44-45.) Again, Jesus’ physical relationship with the leper (changing places with him) is a tangible demonstration of Jesus’ spiritual relationship with us for our salvation—He exchanged places with us:

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—* (Gal. 3:13)

*... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* (Isa. 53:5)

Let us rejoice in Christ our Savior, because of His great compassion for us.

*... at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom. 5:6-8)

## **II. Rejoice in Christ Your Savior, Because of His Authority to Forgive You (Mk. 2:1-12)**

A few days later, Jesus returns to Peter’s house in Capernaum, and the crowds fill the place as Jesus *“spoke the word to them.”*

Suddenly plaster starts falling from the ceiling, then there is a gaping hole, and the next thing you know four men are lowering their crippled friend on his mat. The man is obviously paralyzed, and his friends have obviously brought him to Jesus for healing; but Jesus shocks everyone by announcing, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* Note that Jesus used the plural (*“sins”*), indicating that this is not

merely a case in which this man's physical malady is the direct consequence of some specific act of sin he had committed. On the contrary, Jesus is acknowledging the fact that the suffering and misery of this life, which eventually terminates in death, is a general consequence of sin, as the Apostle Paul states in Romans 5:12, "*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*" Furthermore, in making this pronouncement Jesus is declaring that He possesses the authority to forgive sins.

Upon hearing Jesus' declaration to the man, the scribes who were present took offense. They are not offended that Jesus accepted the fact that there is a fundamental connection between the sufferings of this life—including sickness and disease and finally death itself—and sin. They are offended that Jesus is declaring that He possesses the authority to forgive sins.

Jesus addresses their objection with the question, "*Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'*" It is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven;" since that statement deals with a spiritual relationship, rather than a physical condition, and consequently is not visibly verifiable. Anyone can utter the words, "Your sins are forgiven," but who can verify whether or not forgiveness has actually occurred? So, in order to demonstrate that He really does have the authority to forgive sins, Jesus heals the paralytic with His command, "*Get up, ... and go home.*"

Note that verse 10a is actually an editorial comment by Mark: Jesus healed the paralytic "*so that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*"

Let us rejoice in Christ our Savior, because of His authority to forgive our sins.

*... if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup>He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins ... (1 Jn. 2:1-2a), literally, "he is the propitiation for our sins;" i.e.; the sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine wrath*

### **III. Rejoice in Christ Your Savior, Because of His Willingness to Fellowship with Us (Mk. 2:13-17)**

As Jesus passes through the cities of Galilee, He comes upon Levi at his place of business and issues to him the gracious command, "*Follow me.*" Luke describes this man in these terms, "*a publican, named Levi*" (Lk. 5:27.) Who were the publicans?

To understand who they were and the role they played in Israelite society, it is necessary for us to have some understanding of the Roman system of tax collection. Wealthy capitalists, or joint-stock companies, headquartered in

Rome purchased from the Roman Senate the right to collect custom duties on imports and exports in the Roman provinces. The purchase price for this right was paid into the Roman treasury (*in publicum*); hence, these capitalists were known as *publicani*. The presiding officer (*magister*) of the joint-stock company operated out of Rome. Accountable to him were *sub-magistri* who lived in the provinces and supervised the receipt of monies and the transfer of payments to Rome. Below the *sub-magistri* were the *portitores*, these were the men who worked in the customhouses and actually collected the custom duties—these are the men the N.T. refers to as the “*publicans*.” Levi’s post was situated on the main highway between Damascus and the Phoenician seaports. (Sources: *A Dictionary of the Bible*; Wm. Smith, Editor; S.S. Scranton & Co. Publishers, Hartford, Conn. 1902; pp.779-780. *Bible Cyclopedia*; A.R. Fausset, Compiler; S.S. Scranton & Co. Publishers, Hartford, Conn. 1902; pp.592-593.)

Publicans were among the most despised elements of society. This was the case because of their unscrupulous business practices. Publicans overcharged the merchants and transporters of goods whenever they had the opportunity. Publicans would bring false charges of smuggling against a merchant with the hope of extorting money from him so that he might avoid being taken to court. But even more than because of their unscrupulousness, publicans were despised because they were the local agents who raised tax money to support the oppressive and pagan government of Rome. A publican was excluded from Jewish society; in fact, it was considered disreputable for anyone to associate with them. That was why the publicans were acquaintances with such other outcasts of society as prostitutes and notorious sinners.

Upon following Jesus, the first thing Levi (also called Matthew) did was hold a great banquet; doing so in order to show his love for Jesus and to introduce his friends to Jesus (Mk. 2:15.) So it is that Jesus’ disciples are brought into association with the publicans and sinners—in more ways than one. Not only do the disciples sit beside the publicans and sinners in fellowship with Jesus, but also we all enter into fellowship with the Lord Jesus in exactly the same way—confessing our sins and trusting Him as our Savior. Note that the chief of the apostles makes the same confession as the publican:

*Simon Peter ... fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* (Lk. 5:8)

*... the publican, standing at a great distance, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”* (Lk. 18:13)

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.* (1Tim. 1:15); this is the testimony of the Apostle Paul

Note that Jesus knows of only two categories: the righteous—those who are without sin—and sinners (Mk. 2:17)—and His interest and mission is with the second category, us sinners.

Let us rejoice in Christ our Savior, because of His willingness to fellowship with us and take us into His fellowship. As the Pharisees themselves testified of Jesus, *“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them”* (Lk. 15:2.)

## **Conclusion**

The Scriptures exhort us to *“rejoice in the LORD.”* As a Christian, are you rejoicing in the LORD? As we consider this passage from the Gospel of Mark, we are given three reasons to rejoice in Christ our Savior: 1) because of His compassion for us who are spiritual “lepers;” 2) because of His authority to forgive us, an authority He willingly exercises on our behalf; and 3) because of His willingness to fellowship with us and receive us into the holy fellowship of Himself and God His Father.