

The Life Changing Gospel

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Date: 21 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Thank you, men. Thank you, choir. What a blessing.

If you have your Bibles, I want to turn to Mark chapter 2. Mark chapter 2. I had the privilege on Thursday morning to drive to the North! Greenville University campus with one of our members. He's a board member at North! Greenville. And he invited me to go with him to be a part of a campaign they were doing on the campus last week. They were reading through the Bible out loud on campus for 100 hours.

It takes about 70 or 80 hours to read through the Bible is what they say. I've not sat down and done that in one sitting. But they say it takes about that long. And so for 100 hours.

It started at Monday at 9 o'clock and went through a middle of the day Friday, I believe, if that adds up to 100. And Jim asked me if I could share an hour with him.

[1 : 06] He had signed up. And would I take a half hour? And he'd take a half hour. And I said, well, when are you going? And he said Thursday. And Thursday's the day I work on Sunday.

And I kind of try to keep my calendar as clean as I can on Thursday to make sure I'm prepared for Sunday. And so I was like, what time? And he said 5 to 6 a.m.

I said, my calendar's clear. He said, good, then pick me up. So we did that. And I went back to the office and worked on this sermon.

So if I kind of fall out halfway through, it's because I got up at 3.30 Thursday morning when I was working on it. And I read, I got to read through Hebrews chapter 2, verse 7, through almost the end of Hebrews chapter 11.

And as I'm sitting on that campus, there's a tailgate tent in front of the prayer room. There's a lamp, a high table, and a stool.

[2 : 15] That campus is dark. Nobody moving that I could see. And I was reading Scripture, and I got to Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12.

Now, every morning when I read Scripture, I ask God to give me a verse. Lord, just highlight it spiritually on that page and let me know that's my verse for the day. And I pray through that verse. I post that verse. And that's the verse for the day. I didn't really do that for this. I had already read my Bible before I came. But when I got to Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12, and I thought about reading God's Word over that campus as my daughter's a student there.

And here we are reading God's Word before they ever get up to come to class. I'm telling you, it hit me. For it says, for the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

And I thought, man, I got the verse. I got the verse of the day, you know, or the verse of the hundred hours. I mean, I love that passage because it speaks so graphically about how the Word of God gets to the heart of the matter.

[3 : 39] Now, nowhere does it get to the heart of the matter any more than when we see the power of life, of the life-changing gospel, when we see the good news of Christ change lives as we do in our passage today.

It's in Mark chapter 2, beginning in verse 13. And it says this, He, speaking of Jesus, went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

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.

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. 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?

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.

[5 : 02] Our passage last week in Mark spoke of Jesus speaking in a house that was packed with people, so packed that when four friends wanted to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus, they couldn't even get close to Him.

So they went up the side steps, tore a hole in the roof, and with ropes dropped Him down in front of Christ. And that man's life changed that day. Due to the size of the crowds, in an effort to maximize His efforts, Jesus went to where the people were.

It says, as He was teaching. Now there's no doubt in my mind what He was teaching. He always taught about the kingdom of God. Matthew called it the kingdom of heaven, to clarify for Jews, who He was primarily writing to, to not get the concepts of Judaism mixed up with the need of the gospel of Christ.

But the key message of the kingdom is our hope in the kingdom. And I want you to know that of all the miracles that we see, of all the wonderful things that we see, the effort of Christ here was nothing greater than the preaching of the gospel.

He won the gospel preached. The power behind His ministry was not the healing, although it was amazing. It was not the miracles, although they were amazing. But it was the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 35] We found Him in chapter 1, escaping the crowds to go from village to village to preach the gospel. Mark chapter 1, verse 39 says that He went throughout all of Galilee preaching.

And from the synopsis of the gospels, we get that He not only went there, but He went into Syria and Judea, that He was moving around quite a bit, preaching the gospel as He went.

And now He comes back to Capernaum, and the house got too full. So He went out to the seaside. The seaside of Capernaum is where the people were.

Capernaum was a fishing village, known for its long piers full of boats. And it was a bustling area. And that's where He went.

In such a setting, it does not tell us He did this in this passage, but in such a setting, He was often seen in the gospels, getting in a boat and going out from shore and anchoring that boat and standing in that boat and speaking to those on the shoreline.

[7 : 42] And the reason He did that is because it provided a natural amplification across that water where they could hear His voice and it would carry. We don't know if He does that here, but I know that He was preaching the gospel.

Jesus wanted all to know that their only hope was in acknowledging the wrong in their life, acknowledging their sin and asking God to forgive them of that sin and committing their life to follow the Lord from that day forward.

That was His message. He did many wonderful things like healing, raising, I mean, miracles, even raising someone from the dead. But He came to give the gospel and to fulfill the gospel.

He gave His life for the gospel. And when He resurrected and was about to ascend, He told us that as we go, make disciples.

In other words, share the gospel. Develop people through the gospel. That's what it means by making disciples. And carry it to all people. And He said carry it to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria.

[8 : 53] And that was His long-range plan. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. And if you'll look open the book of Acts, you'll see it starts in Jerusalem. It moves to Judea.

It moved into Samaria. And then the Apostle Paul on three missionary journeys took it to the known uttermost parts of the earth. And it's our responsibility to take it from there to cover the rest of the world.

That was the plan of Christ. That's why He came. He came to preach the gospel.

And to fulfill the gospel. And it's our job to get that gospel out as well. But not only that, but we also see the call of the gospel. In our passage today, He reaches out to Levi.

Levi was a tailor. He specialized in denim. I'm kidding. Levi is also known as Matthew, as in the gospel of Matthew.

[10 : 05] And actually, he was a tax collector. Rome had occupied that Galilean region. And therefore, the people that lived there were required to pay taxes to Rome.

And the kind of tax and toll collector that he was, there was a couple of different kinds, but from the passage and from other passages, we understand that he collected tolls and tariffs and taxes and custom fees at a toll booth under the authority of Rome.

Toll collectors bidded on the job. And when they won the bid, they were given a quota by the Roman government.

And then they were given the authority to charge, hear me now, whatever they wanted. And there's several problems with that.

One is they were crooked. The whole lot of them. The big boss was Caesar. Herod Antipas was put in responsibility over Galilee.

[11 : 10] And so he was the one in charge of that area. He was Rome's pawn with Galilee. And people paid for the privilege to rip into the Jews. Secondly, Levi was a Jew.

As a matter of fact, he was probably a Levite. That's probably where he got his name. And that tribe were the priest. So instead of serving the Lord, he was serving himself at the expense of the Lord's people.

Now, he wasn't Al Capone, but he was working under an Al Capone. I want you to listen to how one commentator described him. He said, Levi is no tax baron, but one who is stationed at an intersection of trade routes to collect tolls, tariffs, imposts, and customs.

Toll collectors were renowned for their dishonesty and extortion. They habitually collected more than they were due, did not always post up the regulations, and made false valuations and accusations.

Tax collectors craved money more than respectability or righteousness. End of quote. When people could not pay, they turned into loan sharks at exorbitant rates.

[12 : 31] I was going to a restaurant, this was years ago. I was going to a restaurant in a strip mall one day, and as I walked by, to go to that restaurant, I walked by a check in the cash place, and on the wall was a board that stated their interest rates.

And on the bottom of that board, I saw an interest rate that said 394%. You can never pay that back.

That's what they did. That was the exorbitant rates that they charged. And all of this was against his own people.

Rabbinical law, which it's not Mosaic law, it's not the first five books of the Bible, it's what the rabbis write about that to describe how you apply it.

And the problem with the scribes was they valued the rabbinical law more than they did the Mosaic law. They went, I mean, it was to detail how to follow the Mosaic law, but they emphasized their rabbinical law and saw it as much of authority as biblical law.

[13 : 42] And rabbinical law said thieves, murderers, tax collectors, all of them are disqualified to witness in court.

They are expelled from the synagogue, and they are disgraced to their families. They were hated. They were hated. A Jew didn't even want to look at them.

Don't you dare look your eyes with a sleazy thief that's aiming at you. But Jesus looked at him. Even with all that, he was not too far from the hand of God.

He was not too far from the love of God. Jesus looked at him and said, follow me. And as he rose out of that booth, leaving it behind and following Christ.

Now, let me tell you something. Peter left his boat to follow Christ. Peter can go back to that boat, and he probably did at some point. James and John left their father, Zebedee, in the boat and followed Christ.

[14 : 56] But at some point, James and John can go back to Zebedee and son's fish supply and work again. When Matthew left the tax booth, he can't go back.

I mean, he's made a change that he can't go back to. When he walked away, there is no turning back. Matter of fact, I think he left that booth singing, I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back. No turning back. The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back. No turning back. No none go with me.

I still will follow. No turning back. Now, God has a lot in store for Matthew. A lot more than he could have imagined. You see, Matthew spent his time taking taxes and writing records and making reports and keeping track.

He made a fine recorder. And the Lord needed one of those for our sake. I believe Matthew left that tax booth and left everything behind but his pen.

[16:03] And took his pen with him. You know what? Luke was a physician. And God used him to write about the conception of Christ and the birth of Christ as Mary dictated to him.

As only a physician could write it. John was a man with a sensitive spirit and a love for the deeper things. And God used him for that.

To write the gospel. Saul of Tarsus was a quick, vigorous, and passionate. God called him and converted him and sanctified him and used those same traits mightily for the kingdom of God.

Listen, I want you to hear me today. If God can use a hardened, thieving, tax trader, he can use anyone. And if he'll give Matthew the opportunity to follow him, he'll give anybody the opportunity to follow him.

I believe he took his pen with him and he used it to write our first gospel. He gave him the call of the gospel that changes lives.

[17:09] But not only that, I want you to see the celebration of the gospel. The first thing that Matthew did after following Christ was to get all his friends together for a big meal.

And Luke calls it a great banquet at his house. There was a large crowd of tax collectors and sinners filled his house. And if Luke called it a great banquet, then I bet his house was not a typical house because he had done well in tax taking.

I mean, we're not just talking about an average sinner, if there's any such thing as that. We're speaking to those sinners that you may, you probably won't admit this.

But there may be some people that are lost that you think can't be saved. I mean, when you think about them, you think there ain't no way in the world they'll ever come to the Lord. I know you're not going to admit that, but the reality is that we get these connotations in our mind of who God can save and who he can't.

I'm telling you, nobody ever thought Matthew would get saved. Nor are all these people that he brought into his house. I mean, we're talking about the scum of the earth. We're talking about the rich that preyed on the poor.

[18:34] We're talking about the people that take the shirt off your back. They were described as the unscrupulous riffraff, the scoundrels of first century Jewish life.

That was Matthew's people. And that's who he shared life with. And when his life suddenly changed by the hand of God, that's who he had to tell.

And he had a guest of honor that day, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I wasn't there. I don't know how it all went down, but I got a sanctified imagination.

And I believe that sometime after that meal, Matthew stood up and said, I want to tell you all what happened to me the other day. And I want to tell you about the man that changed my life.

And then he got Jesus up. And they celebrated what had happened in Matthew's life.

[19:36] Do you know why I believe that's what happened? Because that's what saved people do. That's what people who've been changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, I mean really changed. And give God the acknowledgement that he deserves.

And follows the command that he gives to us. You could say it's a commission that he gives to us to fulfill. That's what you do. I mean when God gets a hold of your life and he's truly changed you, you're radically changed.

Scripture says the old become new. The priorities will change. You see your friends in a different way. And there's no better way to celebrate your salvation than share it with your friends. I mean share it with believers through baptism like we just celebrated.

And then share it with the lost. Tell them what's happened to you. Testify. God changed my life. I never thought it would happen.

It'll do them good to hear it. It'll do you good to say it. You want to get fired up? Share your faith with somebody. You begin to listen to yourself talking about what God has done in your life.

[20:49] It'll do us a world of good. But when you do be ready for something, there's another piece to this. And that is the scorn that comes with the gospel.

Some don't like the gospel. They'll assassinate a man over the gospel. They did it to Jesus. They did it to Peter.

They did it to Paul. Check out the apostles. They'll do it today. They'll do it today. I think they did it today. In all of scripture you see it.

It's in our society. They'll do whatever they can to defame the gospel. All hell wants to snuff out the gospel of Jesus Christ. And sadly, sometimes he uses church folks.

He'll use whatever it takes to snuff out and limit the testimony of the gospel. Now, the scribes were the writers of the law. And it says these were the scribes of the Pharisees.

[22 : 00] I told you last week that means they were separate ones. They don't believe you ought to be with anybody that they consider to not be right. Okay? And they're the ones writing the law.

They didn't write the scriptures. They wrote the explanation of scriptures. And they wrote that those who did not acknowledge their rules were like those that we would say are without Christ, that they're lost.

They were forbidden from having fellowship with them. You couldn't talk to them. If they don't follow the rules, you can't talk to them. You can't travel with them. You can't allow their families to associate with them.

And it's those with all those rules that looked at the Lord's disciples that day and said, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Now, friend, that's not just a question. That's an accusation. That Jesus is not who they need to be associating with.

[23 : 04] And they're not who Jesus needs to be associating with. However, Jesus heard what they said, apparently, and replied, the six who need a doctor.

I've come to call the sinner, not the righteous. Now, I've been to the doctor a few times, more so recently. And it's one thing to go to the doctor for a well check.

They draw blood. They take your weight. They take your blood pressure. They ask you, how are you doing? They ask you, why did you come here today? Well, I just want to make sure everything's all right.

I mean, I got something hurting back in here, and I got this over here. You know. I don't sleep as well as I want to and all that stuff. That's one thing.

It's good to keep your schedule and all that, okay? It's another thing when you rush to the ER, when you're sick and you need a healing touch.

[24 : 09] That's a whole different matter. There's a different attitude that comes with that when life is on the line. You're not merely inquisitive about what may happen. When I'm sick, I need a doctor.

And Jesus said, I've come to cure the sin sick that are hopelessly without salvation. I've come to save the lost.

I've come to those bound for hell. I've come to do miracles. But the greatest miracle, and I don't ever want you to misunderstand this, the greatest miracle that could ever be done was to snatch somebody from the fires of hell into a real relationship with the Father.

That not only lasts for the rest of your life, it lasts for all of eternity. He raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus died. Again. He didn't get raised again. The greatest miracle is the fact that Jesus lived a sinless life, died a sinner's death, even though he was innocent.

Rose again. Ascended into the Father. And is coming back to get us. That's one miracle. And because he did all that, that the second greatest miracle is that your life can be changed for all of eternity when you surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 35] Don't get caught up in all that other stuff. Because all that other stuff just points to the power of the gospel. And that's what happened to Matthew. His life was forever changed.

And do you know what? Some people aren't happy about it. For one, the devil and all of hell and those that don't celebrate with you, and there will be some, must be so much under the influence of the devil and all of hell that they don't want to celebrate with you.

Now what do you do? You don't get mad at them. You don't go pick a fight with them. That's not what you do. You share the gospel with them. They'll never listen.

That ain't your responsibility for them to listen. Your responsibility is to share it and to live it and leave the rest up to God. We can scatter the seed.

We can water it. We can nurture it. We can talk to it like some of y'all do you plants if we want to. But the reality is there's only one Lord of the harvest.

[26 : 46] He's the only one that can bring it about. And so we just do our job and trust it with him. And if they reject Jesus when you shared the gospel with them, they didn't reject you.

That's the deception of the evil one. He wants you to think you're rejected. I tried my best to share with him, and they wouldn't even listen to me. They didn't want to hear the gospel. It ain't you.

It's the gospel. I'm telling you. It changes things. And I want to be like that great missionary of the 1800s. His name was C.T. Studd. C.T. Studd said this.

He said, Some want to live within the sound of the church or the chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. My friend, this passage speaks to all of us today.

If you don't know the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I don't care if you're a member of this church or if you teach a life group in this church. If you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, today's the day of salvation.

[27 : 48] Surrender your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. You said, I did something. I prayed a prayer long ago, and I've never seen a change in my life. I don't think it took. Look, if your life's not changed by coming to Christ, you wouldn't change by Christ.

And you need to come to know Him. It's a message that tells us He'll save anybody and everybody. You can't get too far from Him for Him to bring you back. He saves the lost.

But not only that, I think it speaks to the uncelebrated saved. In other words, if your salvation is just a private experience for you, that you prayed to receive Christ, just you and the Lord, or just you and one other person, and you've just held on to that for weeks, for months, for years, you just held on to that.

I'm going to tell you something. There's nothing biblical about holding that in privately. Nothing about that. Matthew said, come on, y'all. Come on to the house. Come on to the house.

We'll eat big. I got something to tell you. And Jesus, by His example and by His commission, tells us that we announce it through baptism. And that's what these three darling ladies did a little while ago, was just to tell you what's already happened in my life.

[29 : 06] I gave my heart and life to the Lord. And I want folks to know it. And I'm telling you, if you've never acknowledged your faith publicly, today's the day to do that. Invite all your friends.

We're friends here. I think most of us. Invite all your friends to celebrate with you. Then I believe it's also for the satisfied, saved.

Those that have their salvation and are happy about it. because the reality is, your salvation is not something to hoard for yourself.

If you're saved today, God has changed your life. And what He's asked of you is to commit your life to follow Him and to tell others as you go what Christ has done for you.

I believe this is a house of worship and when we leave here, that's a mission field. And it could be somebody you work with. It could be some line you go through in line. Quit chewing on the drive-in lady who don't get it to you on time.

[30 : 28] Instead, share the love of Christ with her. God may have placed her there to need your encouragement. And I believe it's also for the critical of the saved.

Those that think that you have to jump through certain hoops in order for Jesus to save your life. I got news for you. He'll meet you where you are.

I don't have to wait for you to clean up. You can't clean it up anyway. I can't clean up mine. He'll clean it all up. You just surrender your life to Jesus. He'll change your life.

And for the rest of us, celebrate it. Celebrate it. You remember back when football teams used to win? Celebrate it like that.

It's much more meaningful. Hey, it lasts for all of eternity. Celebrate it. Like it means something. May we be a church that is hungry to see people come to the Lord.

[31 : 40] And then we're known for celebrating life change in the way we live and what we see in people's lives. Lord Jesus, I ask today that you'll give us courage no matter what our circumstances are today, dear God.

You'll give us courage to come boldly and say, I need Jesus in my life. To come boldly and say, Lord, this has been private long enough. To come boldly and say, I'm not right.

I know I'm a Christian, but I'm not right with God. And today, I want to live for Him from this day forward. I want to be a bold witness for Him. I want to influence people for the right cause in the right way and to bring honor to Him.

Lord, there may be someone here who's God's drawing to First Baptist Church. They know this is where they are served. God, let them come and obey you today. Let our hearts be right.

Let our souls be saved. Let our burden be great. Let our testimony be strong. Work and move in our midst.

[32 : 53] Right now, oh God, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.