

# Friend of Sinners

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Preacher: Chris Trousdale

[ 0 : 00 ] Gospel of Mark chapter 2, verses 13 through 17. Mark writes, Let's pray.

Father, as we look to your word for guidance tonight, our prayer is that you would challenge the way that we think.

That we wouldn't be satisfied with the status quo. That we wouldn't be satisfied with things as they've been, even in our own minds, in our own hearts.

But that we would be continually reformed by your word. Help us not to be a closed off group. Help us not to be like the scribes of the Pharisees in this passage.

Who are so concerned with protecting their own purity, that they fail to see the great spiritual need around them.

[ 1 : 51 ] Let us never be those kind of people. Open our eyes that we might see wonderful things in your word tonight. It's in Jesus' name that we pray.

Amen. With all the talk and sort of complaining and debating back and forth that I've seen lately about the U.S. budget and deficits and all those kinds of things, I was curious to know how our country arrived at the place where it is today in terms of just the sheer size and scope of our budget and the amount of money that we owe to others.

And what I discovered was that the United States first crossed that trillion dollar mark in terms of budget in 1987. And then 25 years later, we are now almost four times that amount.

We've almost quadrupled it. And for me, that's hard to wrap my brain around. In fact, I was trying to do some calculations and I got out my phone and was going to use the calculator on my phone and you can't fit enough zeros to put a trillion on the calculator.

You can't do it. So I got out a little small calculator I have at the house. It was a little bit bigger than my phone. I still couldn't fit enough zeros. I had to actually find an online calculator that was really big and wide for me to be able to fit all the zeros that you needed on there.

[ 3 : 24 ] And while I was doing some of this, my own little personal research, I discovered some interesting things. So for instance, according to the census in 2010, the median household income in America was right about \$47,000, just a little bit more than that.

So if you're trying to figure out how do you get a trillion dollars out of that kind of a household? Well, if you confiscated one family, it was making \$47,000.

If you confiscated all of their money, I mean every penny of it, then you would have to do that for \$21,276,595 years before you got to a trillion dollars.

Which if you're an IRS agent is probably not the best way to sort of go about generating revenue and getting the money that you're supposed to get. But on the other hand, there are about 115 million households in the country.

So you could just take \$8,700 from every household, every single household, and then you would get to a trillion dollars in just one year.

[ 4 : 31 ] But that, I thought, would probably make a lot of people angry because almost half of those households don't pay any taxes right now. So they'd be all mad that you have to pay them. And besides, we would really need four times that in order to meet our current budget.

So that's not really a good way to go about doing it. And despite all of that information and how difficult it is, because the reality is you can't just figure up this and how much money we need and do division to come up with the amount of taxes.

The tax system in our country is incredibly complicated. You have all different kinds of taxes for different kinds of businesses, for different kinds of income, for different levels of income, and all those sorts of things.

And so it's just incredibly complicated. I mean, just trying to understand our tax code, to me, is almost impossible. And yet, despite all of that, despite all that, I would still say that the means of collecting money that our tax collectors at the IRS has at their disposal today are far better than the system that ancient Rome had for collecting its taxes.

In fact, the Roman government related to its tax collectors kind of like the McDonald's Corporation relates to its individual franchises. The Romans had what's called a tax farming system.

[ 5 : 55 ] So that the tax collector on the ground, the man who would actually knock on doors and sit at what's called the tax booth and actually collect the taxes, the tax collector on the ground was required to get a certain amount of taxes from his region, okay?

And so anything over that that he got went into his own pocket. So, you know, if he was supposed to collect \$1,000 that year, if he collected \$1,200, he just gets \$200.

He just gets it, all right? And then the guy who's above him has the same standard in place. He has a certain amount that he's got to collect and anything over that he gets to keep.

So he's going to tell the guy underneath him, he's going to erase the amount that he's supposed to get. And it's like that all the way up the hierarchy in the Roman tax collecting system so that the whole system really was set up almost to encourage the tax collectors to extort people and collect more money than they should have.

Now, when you understand that that's how their system worked, try to imagine yourself as a Jew living in Palestine in the first century. The Romans are in charge because they have the biggest army.

[ 7 : 10 ] That's just the facts. They've conquered you. In fact, you've been conquered by multiple civilizations by now. And the most recent conquerors are the Romans. And so they're in charge.

And the Romans need to pay for this massive army that they've used to conquer you and that they continue to use to keep you under control. And so they send tax collectors into your hometown to take some of your money.

So the way that you and I probably feel about the IRS would seem like a love fest compared to the way that the Jews felt about these Roman tax collectors.

In fact, the only people that the Jews in Palestine at this point in time would have hated more than a Roman tax collector would have been a Jewish tax collector working for the Romans because they're traitors on top of everything else.

When a Jew became a tax collector from the Romans, he was excommunicated from the synagogue. He would no longer be allowed to serve as a judge or a witness in any local courts, any local trials.

[ 8 : 16 ] He couldn't even be a witness because his character was thought so flawed. What's the point in even having him say anything? Everything that's going to come out of his mouth is going to be a lie anyway. So they're no longer qualified to do anything like that.

They're total outcasts in their community. So much so that even their family that may have had nothing to do with their career choice, their whole family is brought into disgrace.

And yet right here in this text, in our passage, we see Jesus not just interacting with a Jewish tax collector, but calling one to be his disciples and then joining in a meal with this tax collector and all of his tax collector friends.

That man's name is Levi. Most of us know him as Matthew. Matthew really is not mentioned very often in the New Testament. In fact, outside of this story, which is also recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, outside of this story, he's only mentioned in lists of disciples.

So there are no more stories where Matthew's name pops up. He's in this story where he's called to be a disciple. He's mentioned in the lists of the twelve disciples. And that's it.

[ 9 : 34 ] The New Testament doesn't tell us anything else about him. He's most well known for being the author of the first gospel in our New Testaments. And church tradition tells us that later down the road, he eventually became an evangelist.

He went to Parthia and then he went down to Ethiopia where he was speared to death for his faith. So what we're really seeing when we read here in the Gospel of Mark about Levi is the turning point in his entire life.

A hated, greedy, traitorous tax collector becomes a gospel witness and martyr. And verse 13 sets the context for that entire event.

Take a look at what it says. It says that he, that's Jesus, Jesus went out again beside the sea and all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them.

Now the last time in this gospel that we saw Jesus out beside the sea of Galilee was when he called his first four disciples to himself. Peter and Andrew and James and John.

[10:44] And if you're reading the other gospels alongside Mark, then you know by now that Jesus has at least six of his twelve disciples. He has those four disciples and the Gospel of John tells us that he's also added Philip and Nathaniel who's also known as Bartholomew.

So he has six of his twelve at least by now when he calls Matthew to be one of his disciples. And now here we see Jesus once again along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

But this time, according to Mark, Jesus has added company. Because apparently the Capernaum crowd is now a traveling show.

And Jesus, according to the passage for his part, has not really changed his mode of operation at all.

It says in verse 14 that as he passed by, he saw, I'm sorry, it says at the end of verse 13 that he was teaching the people.

[11:44] He was teaching them. So Jesus has this sort of laser-like focus on his mission and on his purpose. He knows what he's supposed to be about. He's here to teach. He's here to preach the gospel.

And all of these crowds that now are following him everywhere he goes, they're not stopping him. They're not going to distract him from it. And then verse 14 tells us, he's out in this teaching crusade by the sea, that as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at a tax booth and he said to him, follow me.

So Levi's just doing his job. He's at the tax booth. He's collecting taxes from all the traders and travelers because he's probably, this tax booth is probably located along one of the major routes that would cross the Roman Empire.

One of those routes passed right near where Capernaum was and right along the Sea of Galilee. So part of Levi's job was probably collecting taxes from all the traders who would go down that route.

So he's got a tax booth set up there along the sea right by the road and he's stopping the travelers and he's collecting their taxes. Not only that, but we know that at this point in time, the fishing industry was fairly heavily taxed.

[13:02] So Levi's probably there also to collect taxes from all the fishermen as they bring their catches in. He's going to take a cut from whatever they sell in the markets, which means that he probably had a great relationship with those first four disciples that Jesus called.

And yet here now, we see Jesus looking at him and despite his reputation, despite his profession, he gives to Levi the exact same command that he gave to those other four disciples.

Follow me. The exact same command. And just like the others, and he rose and followed him.

Him. Now when we covered the calling of these four disciples several weeks ago, one of the things we saw is that those four men, they didn't follow Jesus blindly. They had already met Jesus down in Judea.

They were there for part of John the Baptist's ministry and they were there when Jesus arrived on the scene and we're told that Jesus, that they went aside with Jesus and they spent several hours one evening being taught by Jesus and learning from Jesus so that when they meet up again in the north in Galilee and Jesus calls them and says, follow me.

[14:15] It sounds as if when you read that story by itself, it sounds like they've never met Jesus and yet here he shows up while they're working and they're fishing and he says out of the blue, follow me and they just drop everything they've got.

They drop their nets literally and they take off and they follow a God that they don't really know anything about. But that's not the case because they knew him. They'd spent time with him down in Judea. I don't think it's the case here either that Levi decides to follow a man that he doesn't know anything about.

I think Levi, probably sitting at his tax booth, probably heard Jesus teaching the crowds. He probably has at least some idea of who Jesus is.

He has some idea of what the message of Christ is. He's probably seen him heal people. He's probably seen him cast out demons. There's no doubt that he would have heard all the rumors in

Capernaum about this great teacher who can do these incredible things.

He knows something about who Jesus is. So it's really not, it's not that big of a surprise that Levi, like those other four men, would follow Jesus when he says, follow me.

[15:23] That's not the shocking thing in this passage at all. The thing that's so surprising is the fact that Jesus would issue a call to Levi in the first place. But that's exactly what he does.

And he goes a step beyond that. Take a look at verse 15. It says, 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.

Now usually when we read these kinds of stories, we read through them so quickly that we don't really think about what the writer is really telling us. Mark is telling us that Jesus went to Levi's house for dinner, for a meal.

That's what it means when it says he reclined at table. Because they didn't have chairs, you know, typically at a table in those days. They would have cushions and pillows lying on the floor and they would literally, they would eat a meal and then they would literally sit back, recline on those pillows, and they would talk and have a good time.

That's what they did. They didn't have restaurants. They didn't go to sit in a booth in a restaurant like we'll do when we want to visit with somebody. They went, if they wanted, if you wanted to get to know someone, if you wanted to spend time with somebody, you either invited them to your house or you went to their house and you ate a meal and after the meal you sat back and you just spent time with them.

[16:50] That's exactly what Jesus is doing and that's a really, really big deal in their culture. I mean, we'll have a meal with anybody, right? I mean, if a business, somebody that we have some business with that we don't really know at all, we'll go out to dinner with them.

We'll have a meal with them. It's not a big deal to us, but it was a big deal for a Jew in the first century. You don't eat with people like Levi. You don't eat with unclean, sinful outcasts.

So that what Jesus is doing by going to Levi's house and having a meal with him and spending time with him is breaking all the rules of etiquette and he's sending a signal to everyone that this traitorous, immoral tax collector is acceptable to him.

That's the message that everybody else is receiving. And it would be one thing for Jesus to address Levi in public and tell him to repent. That's one thing. It's, that wouldn't be a big deal at all.

John the Baptist did that with the tax collectors. In Luke chapter 3, it says that tax collectors came to John the Baptist and were to be baptized by him and they said, Teacher, what shall we do?

[18:02] And John tells them, Collect no more than you're authorized to do. So he just tells them to quit sinning, quit doing what you've been doing. That's not, if Jesus had done that, if Jesus had just looked at Levi and said, Levi, you need to repent, you need to stop cheating people.

Not a big deal at all. But he doesn't do that. He goes to the man's house, sits down with him, has a meal with him.

And it gets even worse than that. He doesn't just eat with Levi. Mark tells us that Jesus and his disciples were surrounded by many tax collectors and sinners.

So now, it's not just that Jesus is having dinner with a sinner. Jesus is having dinner with a whole bunch of sinners. Now he's added this to his mode of operation.

This is how Jesus does things now. So that if his goal were to stir up controversy, if his goal were to aggravate the religious authorities, then he's done that in just one fell swoop here.

[19:07] And verse 16 tells us that that's exactly what happens. The religious leaders are upset. It says, And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

This right here is where we see one of the key differences between true religion and false religion. This is where you can tell if somebody really believes the gospel or if they just adhere to their traditions.

Because gospel people are people who actually love sinners. One of the ways that you can tell the difference between genuine sanctification and legalism is in how those who are supposed to be holy, how they respond to people who are clearly and obviously unholy.

You see, now Jesus is sending a signal to everyone that the way that you've been doing things is the wrong way to do it.

And I've come to change all of that. Now, I would concede the point that it's true that there are times when we have to avoid being in certain people's company.

[ 20 : 28 ] I mean, that's true. There are good reasons for that. I mean, the book of Proverbs over and over warns us to avoid the immoral woman who comes to represent, to avoid those who would entice you and pull you into sin.

So it's true that we can't always go everywhere we want to go and be around everyone that we want to be around. I mean, it wouldn't be smart of an alcoholic who's trying to quit drinking to go and hang out at bars with a bunch of other alcoholics.

That wouldn't be a very smart thing at all to do. But that's not what Jesus is doing here. I mean, Jesus isn't, He's not compromising Himself. He's not sinking down to their level.

I mean, outreach, outreach only becomes compromise when we refuse to call people to repentance and faith. At that point, what you're calling outreach, if you won't tell them the gospel and you won't tell them of their need to repent, at that point your association with them becomes compromised.

But that's not what Jesus is doing. He initiated this whole encounter with Levi by saying to him, follow me. Well, the only way he's going to follow Jesus is to give up everything that he's been doing.

[ 21 : 41 ] There's no other way around it. Jesus begins this whole conversation with Levi, his entire relationship, by calling him to leave behind all this stuff.

And that's when the criticism came. Jesus is very careful to explain exactly what he's doing here. He tells them in verse 17, it says, when Jesus heard it, he hears these scribes complaining to his disciples, and when he hears it, he says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous but sinners. So Jesus has come to heal, but not just those who are physically ill. Jesus has come for those who are spiritually sick.

He's not come to comfort sinners and to reassure them that they're okay. That's not what he's come to do. He's come to call them to become his followers, to forsake their old way of life, and to embrace a new way.

The difference between evangelists and legalists is that legalists like to point out other people's sins, whereas evangelists bring the good news that delivers them from their sin.

[ 22 : 59 ] The difference is that legalists are just diagnosticians. All they can do is look and say, this is what's wrong with you, whereas evangelists are healers because they bring the remedy for spiritual sickness.

forgiveness. Now the truth is it's just easier, honestly, to be a legalist than it is to be an evangelist. It just is. It's easier to talk about sinners than to go and actually talk to them.

It's easier to point fingers at people than to point people to Christ. The question really that we need to ask ourselves as a church, as individuals, is not about whether we should reach out to lost people.

That's not it. That's clear. That's what Jesus is doing. That's what He calls us to do. That's not the question. The question is, how do we do that? How can we do what Jesus does here?

How can we fulfill the great commission that He's given to us? I don't think it's a matter of putting together the right outreach program or having the right advertising campaign.

[ 24 : 11 ] I don't think that's at all. Jesus doesn't have a program here. Paul never followed any kind of strategy of advertising. He didn't do any of that. I don't think those are bad, but I just don't think that they're the answer.

By themselves, all the flyers that we send out and all the brochures that we hand out, by itself, that's not going to do anybody any good. That's not going to get things done.

The biblical pattern that we see Jesus model for us is actually really, really simple. It's got two steps to it. First thing is you've got to get the message right.

Jesus came out to the seashore to preach the same gospel that He had been preaching in towns and villages all over the area. The same gospel.

The same one that's summarized for us in chapter 1 verses 14 and 15. The kingdom of God is at hand. The time is fulfilled. Repent and believe in the good news, Jesus says.

[ 25 : 14 ] You have to get the message right first of all. The message is simple. I'll sum it up for you in five parts. This is the gospel message, real simple, in five parts.

Part number one is that it begins with God. God created everything that exists. He created us in His image. He made us to know Him, to love Him, and to bring glory to Him.

We can't assume that people already believe that anymore. Maybe 50 years ago or even 30 years ago you could assume that everybody believed that. But people don't believe that anymore.

Now people have been so filled with the idea that life evolved and human beings are here by chance so that they believe that if God exists at all, then He doesn't really have any bearing upon day-to-day life, and He certainly doesn't have any rights over me.

And Genesis 1-1 comes in and shatters that worldview. In the beginning, God. Not in the beginning, human beings. Not in the beginning, man.

[ 26 : 20 ] In the beginning, God. And that's where we have to start. He made you, and He owns you. Step two is just that we've all failed to give God the glory that He rightly deserves.

We've all sinned, and that's not a minor mistake. It's not a misstep. It's not a slip-up. Sin is a refusal to glorify God as we ought to glorify Him.

It's rebellion against the one who made us and owns us. Step three, because of that, because we've sinned against a perfect and holy Creator, He is angry with us.

It's a part of the gospel message that gets left out all the time, and if you leave it out, there's no gospel. He's angry. His wrath burns against us, and He's not a grandfatherly figure up in the sky. He's holy and majestic and glorious, and He's just, and He will not let sin go unpunished. He will not. And then fourth, God has not let sin go unpunished.

[ 27 : 30 ] Instead, He sent His Son into the world to take the punishment that we deserve. Jesus Himself endured the wrath of His Father so that He could put an end to Satan's schemes and deliver us from death into life.

He has, Paul says, taken the curse upon Himself, and He offers to us His perfect obedience in its place. It's a good exchange.

My sin for His righteousness. My curse for His life and freedom. that's a good exchange to give to people. The last step is, though, that you only receive that and you only participate in that exchange by faith in Christ and turning away from your old life.

You do that, God will forgive your sins and He'll receive you as His very own children. He'll give you life that never ends and He promises us victory over death through the resurrection of Jesus so that everlasting life and limitless joy can be had through faith in Christ.

That's the gospel. It's not that complicated. It's just five simple, straightforward truths that you give to them. That's the message of the kingdom that Jesus brought.

[ 28 : 43 ] That's the message of Jesus. And if we love people the way that Jesus loved them, then we won't pretend to be their friends and then fail to meet their greatest needs. A friend never tells you what you want to hear, right?

We all know that about friends. Friends tell us what we need to hear so that a friend tells you if you have food on your face, right? I don't let you walk out in public with food all over your face.

She warns you if your zipper's down, okay? She should anyway if she's your friend or if your hair's all a mess. And that's stuff that doesn't even matter.

It doesn't really matter if you go out into the world with food on your face and your clothes all messed up and your hair sticking out everywhere. None of that even matters. So that if we would be the friend of those who desperately need a real friend, we would go beyond that.

We would say to people, you're unprepared. Not to go out into the world, you're unprepared to face your creator. And if you're unprepared in that final moment when you face him, then everything is lost.

[ 29 : 55 ] We have to get that message right if we want to see souls saved. It's one thing to get the message right though. It's another thing entirely to move on to step two and to actually make the message known.

Biblical pattern for reaching the lost simple. Get the message right and make the message known. And the only way that we're ever going to have the opportunity to do that and to spread the gospel is if we actually have some kind of interaction with sinners.

sinners. That's the main point of this whole passage. That's what this passage is about. So we shouldn't be offended by non-Christians. I'm constantly amazed by how much I hear professing Christians complain about the world.

Complain constantly about lost, sinful people. We shouldn't be offended by them. We just need to reach out to them. We shouldn't expect them to live up to our standards. We just need to tell them to trust in Jesus because they fail to live up to God's standards.

It's simple. You see, because Jesus was willing to look Levi in the eye and say, follow me, he gained the attention and the trust of many tax collectors and sinners.

[ 31 : 09 ] You don't have to have a big audience. You just have to faithfully reach out to whoever's right in front of you and it opens the door to a bigger audience. You have to be prepared for opposition when you do that.

You have to be prepared for those that you genuinely believe are your co-laborers in taking that message out. Sometimes, sometimes they'll oppose you when you step out and begin to build relationships with non-believers.

Sometimes their opposition is just overt, straightforward. I don't think you should do that. You're doing the wrong thing. But sometimes it's a little more covert. Sometimes they'll make suggestions. Sometimes they'll tell you you need to avoid certain people and certain associations because we really don't want to offend our other brothers and sisters.

And if you interact with this person over here, you're going to offend them. So you really need to try to avoid them at all costs. Don't hang out with them. It'll send the wrong message to everybody else.

[ 32 : 13 ] Have you ever heard Paul's words to the Corinthians used to argue in that kind of a way? In 1 Corinthians chapter 8, you may remember this.

Paul is talking about whether or not the Corinthians should eat meat that was offered in the temple to a pagan idol. Because back in those days, an offering would be made, but the meat wasn't going to be just thrown away and wasted.

They would then, after an offering, after somebody came and offered up, say, a goat, then the meat from the goat would then be taken to the market. And the priests in the pagan temples would make some money off of that, and the market would make some money off of it.

And somebody would buy it, and they'd take it home, and then they would cook it. And it's a big controversy in the church in Corinth as to whether or not a Christian, if they were invited to someone's house who was not a believer to eat dinner, could they eat meat that they knew had been offered in a pagan sacrifice.

It was an issue. This is what Paul says about that. Paul tells them that they are allowed to eat the meat, but he says, but take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

[ 33 : 24 ] For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged if his conscience is weak to eat food offered to idols?

And so the argument goes, based on that scripture, that if a weaker brother sees you associating with certain kinds of people, he might be tempted to do the same thing and violate his own conscience, so you really need to avoid those sinful people out there in the world as much as you can.

And I don't think that's Paul's point at all in that passage. Paul is not talking about who we associate with. He's talking about what we do when we're associating with non-believers.

He assumes that we're going to be around and have relationships with non-Christians. He never tells them don't go to dinner with a lost person. He doesn't say that. He says that if they serve meat that's been offered to idols and there's an immature Christian present, then don't eat the meat because it might offend an immature believer.

So if you go to somebody's house and let's say you have a non-Christian friend and they invite you over for dinner and they serve wine.

[ 34 : 34 ] Drink the wine if you want to drink the wine. It doesn't matter. But if there's another immature Christian who happens to be there and they just believe in the core of their being that drinking wine is sinful and wrong even though you know it's not, then don't drink it.

It's not complicated. But he never says don't go eat at their house. How are you ever going to reach people if you won't associate with the Levi's of the world?

You won't. You see, a legalist will take a passage like that in 1 Corinthians and they'll try to use it to cut you off from the people that you're called to serve.

I don't doubt that the scribes and the Pharisees who are present in this passage, I don't doubt that they probably argued using Scripture. The Scripture interpreted according to their own traditions, but they probably used Scripture against the things that Jesus was doing. But that didn't stop Jesus from going to Levi's house. And because Jesus couldn't be deterred, now we can open our Bibles and read the Gospel of Matthew.

[ 35 : 50 ] One of the greatest sinners became one of the greatest evangelists. One of the most despised by the legalists became one of the most favored heralds of Christ.

It is possible that that guy at work who can't seem to get a sentence out of his mouth without three or four curse words, it's possible that he could become the most effective evangelist in your company.

It's possible. Or the lady who lives in your neighborhood who gossips every time she opens her mouth, she might end up telling more people about Christ than all of us put together, but not if she never hears the Gospel.

It'll never happen. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. Romans 1, verse 16. Ten chapters later, but how will they hear without someone preaching to them?

That's our job. That's our task. Some of you might have heard of a guy named John Newton. Most people know him because he wrote the hymn Amazing Grace.

[ 37 : 02 ] John Newton, before he became a believer, was a captain of a slave trading ship.

And for several years, he made trips down to Africa and purchased slaves and then delivered them into England, into Britain, where they would be sent all over the world to serve as slaves to white people.

he was not just a slave ship captain. He was known for being among the slave ship captains for being an incredibly immoral slave ship captain.

That's hard to do, to be an immoral person among incredibly immoral people. That was one of the things that he was known for. One of the interesting things about him is that early on in his career as a sailor, before he was a captain, he was so belligerent and he was so bad that he tried to incite a mutiny on a slave ship.

Not among the slaves, just among the sailors against the captain just because he didn't like the guy. And he almost lost his life then. They were going to throw him overboard into the ocean and then they decided, no, we're going to sell him as a slave.

[ 38 : 16 ] And he spent a couple of years as a slave in Africa to an African woman and her white husband. starved, chained up in the woods, left alone for weeks and weeks, and yet it did not stir within him any sympathy for the slaves that he would spend years trafficking.

It didn't bother him one bit. And most people, his family included, had written him off. It just, he's a lost cause.

And then you fast forward several decades after his conversion, he hasn't just written amazing grace, he's written hundreds and hundreds of hymns. He served in multiple churches as pastor and led countless people to the Lord.

No one, no one would have ever thought that he could do any of those things because he was just like Levi. He was just a hopeless, lost, sinful person.

But at some point in time, he came into contact with the gospel and everything changed. For us, the issue is whether or not we will be that point in time when people come into contact with the gospel and everything changes for them.

[ 39 : 40 ] It may mean that you have to foster dozens of relationships with lost people who don't share your values, who don't talk like you talk, who don't do the things that you do.

You may have to foster dozens of those kinds of relationships before you see one of them converted. But if just one were a Levi, it would all be worth it.

And Jesus calls us to do the things that he does. He calls us to enter into their world and to look them in the eye and say, follow Christ. Let's pray. Let's pray.