

## WEEK 3

### JESUS – WHY DID HE COME?

#### BEFORE THE TALK

*Welcome the course participants and suggest they take 20 minutes to work through the Study Guide section called GROUP DISCUSSION 1 with their group.*

#### THE TALK

*Deliver the talk. The wording below is intended only as a general guide. The aim of the talk is to show that Jesus came to rescue us from sin, judgement and hell (Mark 2:17).*

Sometimes we experience things in life that give us an uncomfortable dose of reality. Maybe you've joined a gym and discovered just how unfit you are; or had a medical check that gave you jolt; or been told a few home truths by a close friend.

*When I joined my university rugby club, I was sent a summer training schedule and told to show up for club pre-season testing on 12 September, just before term started. I circled the date on my calendar but filed the training schedule in the bin, thinking, "Well, I'll just go on some runs and do a few sit-ups. I'll be fine." Anyway, when I arrived, the coach came in and said, "Right, we'll start with the Bleep Test." This was a test in which you had to run back and forth over twenty yards in time with a bleep that gets faster and faster. You ran until you dropped. I was the second to drop out, having collapsed and been physically sick. Then we had to strip off to our shorts for the fat tests. There was only one other player with a higher percentage of body fat than me. Everything was carefully noted down. It was extremely humiliating. At the end of all these tests the coach said, "Well, it's not comfortable, but at least we've discovered the truth on the training ground before the real questions get asked out on the playing field. Some of you have really been exposed, haven't you?"*

Listening to what Jesus has to say about you and me can be extremely uncomfortable because it exposes what we are really like. And, in a way, the title for tonight's talk could be, "I wish I didn't have to tell you this!"

Last week we asked, "Who was Jesus?" Whatever answer we come up with, it has to take into account the evidence in Mark's Gospel, evidence that suggests he is a man with God's power and authority.

He amazed crowds with his teaching, cured diseases and calmed a storm, as we just saw in our GROUP DISCUSSION. We've seen him raising the dead, saying, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" and bringing a corpse back to life. And we've also seen him forgiving sin, as you will remember from the story of the paralytic at the end of last week.

Tonight we turn our attention to another vital question: “Why did Jesus come?” How would you answer that?

Did he want to bring peace on earth? That’s the Jesus of Christmas carols. Was it to cure disease and end the sufferings of the world? That’s Jesus the great healer. Or did he want to reform society and give us an example of how to live? That’s Jesus the great teacher.

Although there is an element of truth in each of those options, Mark’s Gospel doesn’t give any of them as Jesus’ main aim. According to Mark, the reason Jesus came was to rescue rebels.

*You will need to have the following headings ready for display, gradually revealing each of the headings as the talk progresses.*

Jesus came to rescue rebels.

We are all rebels.

We are in danger.

## JESUS CAME TO RESCUE REBELS

So, point 1, Jesus came to rescue rebels.

Please open your Bibles to Mark chapter 2, verses 13–17.

*Read aloud Mark 2:13–17.*

You will see in this passage that there are two groups of people – the good guys and the bad guys. The bad guys are made up of people like Levi. Tax collectors were more hated than they are today. Not only were they seen as cheating their fellow Jews out of their hard-earned cash, but they were also seen as betraying God’s people because they were working for the occupying Roman forces.

The good guys are the senior religious figures of the day – the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They looked impeccable – whiter than white, in religious terms.

The question is, who would you expect Jesus to hang around with? Instinctively we’d expect him to want to be with the good guys, the religious elite.

But this is what Jesus says to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

The big shock at this dinner party is who Jesus wants on his guest list. In verse 17 Jesus says, “I’m a doctor and, as a doctor, I’m interested in the sick because the sick know they need me.” It’s obvious, isn’t it, that doctors don’t dish out medicine to the healthy? If a doctor came into your office with his scalpel and pills, you’d say, “Get lost, don’t come around here trying to carve me up. Go and slice up some sick person instead.” So Jesus says here, “If you think you’re righteous, if you think you’re healthy, then you won’t think that you need me. Just as healthy people don’t need doctors, so people who think they are righteous don’t need me.”

“No,” says Jesus here, “I’ve come for sinners. I’ve come for people who realize they are living as rebels in God’s world.” That’s what a sinner is – someone who knows he has not let God be God. Jesus makes it quite clear here that he is interested in people who realize they’re bad, not in people who think they are good.

So, the qualification for coming to Jesus is not, “Are you good enough?” but, “Are you bad enough?” He’s come for sinners, not the righteous.

So that’s the answer to the question, “Why did Jesus come?” He came to call sinners. “I’ve come,” Jesus says, “on a rescue mission to call rebels back into a relationship with the God who made them, with the God who gives them each breath, and yet who is treated like a footnote in their lives.”

We’ll see how Jesus achieves that rescue next week, but tonight I want to focus on the assumption that Jesus is making. He is assuming that we are all rebels who need to be rescued, even if we believe we’re righteous. Jesus assumes that you and I need him to rescue us.

## WE ARE ALL REBELS

And that’s the second point: we are all rebels.

Jesus is, after all, being a little sarcastic when he calls the teachers of the law and the Pharisees “righteous” in verse 17. They are righteous by their own standards, but not by God’s. Actually they are totally self-righteous, and just as much in need of rescue as everyone else, even though they don’t see it. In fact, as we discover in Mark chapter 3, verse 6, these “righteous” people end up wanting to kill Jesus.

Jesus assumes here that every single human being needs to be rescued. And if that assumption is uncomfortable for you, then we need to expose ourselves to another tough question: What is the world really like? Surely, when we look at the world, we see a mixture of good and evil.

There are lots of things about the world that we love – things that make life worth living. Seeing some things makes us think that this world is a pretty special place. We see a little child leap with delight into his mother’s arms. Or a couple strolling along holding hands, lost in each other’s company.

But then, the child falls down and starts crying, and we realize that pain is never far behind happiness in our world. Then we see the couple fighting and think of all the marriages that end in divorce.

A history of the twentieth century will tell you that one hundred million people died violently in those one hundred years. That's more than died violently in the previous nineteen centuries put together. It doesn't take much to realize that war and death are never far behind peace and life in our world.

The Bible says that the reason *the world* is not the way it's supposed to be is because *we* are not the way *we're* supposed to be.

And yet it still grates against our pride to think that *we* need to be rescued. We might concede that *some* people need to be rescued: the really evil people – the murderers, rapists, the paedophiles – but not us, and certainly not our family and friends. We're basically good people with a few human faults here and there. We're confident that our good points outweigh the bad – that we are good enough for God. But we must ask the next tough question: “What are we really like?”

Imagine for a moment that this room is a public gallery, and plastered all over the walls is a record of your life. Every day is on the walls: 24 May 1989, 24 May 1990, 24 May 1991, 24 May 1999 – every single day. It is a complete and true account not only of everything you've ever said and done, but also of everything of you've ever thought. Even your motives are revealed for everyone to see.

Now I'm sure there would be lots to celebrate on those walls: loving relationships, real achievements, acts of kindness, moments of generosity and selflessness, perhaps a flourishing career. But there would also be thousands of things that we'd want to keep out of the public gaze. Which bit of the wall would you most want to cover up? Which day? Maybe it's something no-one knows – not even your closest friend or your spouse.

And it is not just the things we've said and done that are a problem. The things we *should* have done and the people we *should* have helped are up on the walls as well. Everything is exposed for everyone to see.

If my life was on the walls it would be a nightmare. I wouldn't be able to stay in the room, I'd be so ashamed. Could you – if you're being honest?

So what's the problem? Jesus gives us the answer in Mark chapter 7.

The issue in this chapter is what makes someone unclean in God's eyes; what makes someone unacceptable to God. The Pharisees are blaming external things – you are unacceptable because of what you touch, where you go, what you eat. But Jesus says the problem is much closer to home.

Please turn to Mark chapter 7, and we'll read verses 18–23.

*Read aloud Mark 7:18–23.*

The problem, says Jesus in verse 21, is our hearts. That's what makes us unclean. If we were to trace all of the evil in the world back to its source, the place we'd end up is in the human heart.

Why do we find it hard to do the right thing? Why is it so difficult to keep good relationships good? Why do we hurt the people we love the most? Why can't we automatically love each other? Because we've all got a heart problem.

Out of our hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. Those things are what make us unclean. That's where the fits of rage, jealousy, selfish ambition and envy all come from.

“But,” you may be saying to yourself, “I'm not that bad. I know I'm not perfect, but I'm not as bad that.” Well, it gets worse, I'm afraid. Please turn to Mark chapter 12 and we'll read verses 28–30.

*Read aloud Mark 12:28–30.*

Since God made us, and sustains us, and gives us every good thing we enjoy, and since he has power and authority over our lives, how should we respond to him? Jesus tells us: our response should be to love him.

And the really scary word here is “all” – love God with *all* your heart, soul, mind and strength. So no part of our lives should be withheld from God. He is to have all of everything.

But actually he's had all of nothing.

We decide exactly what we will do with our heart, soul, mind and strength. We give our hearts to lots of things, but not to our Creator. We don't even *know* his commands, let alone seek to *obey* them. We develop relationships with others, but we neglect the very relationship for which we were primarily designed.

And instead of *loving* God, we live as if we *were* God. If we think about everything up on those walls, the complete record of our lives, that's true, isn't it? Each and every one of us is guilty – guilty of rebelling against our loving Creator. That rebellion is what the Bible calls “sin.”

And that leads us to point 3. Because of our sin, we're in danger.

## WE ARE IN DANGER

I'm sure many of you have seen the movie *Titanic*. Most of the passengers are blind to how serious their situation is. They are having the party of their lives. But the shipbuilder who designed the boat knows the truth. He knows that the ship will sink and that there aren't enough lifeboats. He knows the situation is deadly serious.

And Jesus warns us that *our* situation is deadly serious because of our sin. He spells this out very clearly in Mark chapter 9, verses 43–47. And it's not comfortable reading.

*Read aloud Mark 9:43–47.*

Jesus warns us here that our sin will lead us to hell. If we reject God throughout our lives, then ultimately he will respect that decision – and reject us.

Believe me, I take no pleasure in relating these words of Christ, just as God takes no pleasure in allowing people to go their own self-destructive way. I hope you can see that the reason Jesus warns us about hell is because he loves us and does not want us to go there.

According to Jesus, we should do anything we can to avoid going to hell. If our foot causes us to sin, we should cut it off. If it's our eye, we should cut it out. Hell is real, and we should do anything we can to avoid it.

But here's our predicament. What's our biggest problem? *It is our heart*. If our problem was the foot, or the hand, we could cut it off. But we can't cut out our heart.

That, above all else, is why we need Jesus to rescue us. That's why he came. As he said himself, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

And next week, we'll see exactly how Jesus does that.

## **AT THE END OF THE TALK**

Let me leave you with the following questions for your groups. Hopefully they'll prompt some discussion.

*Display the following questions and read them aloud.*

- Do you agree that you're in danger?
- How would you feel if your every thought, word and action was displayed on the walls for everyone to see?
- What's your reaction to Jesus' words in Mark chapter 9, verses 43–47?

*Allow 30 minutes for groups to work together through the Study Guide section called **GROUP DISCUSSION 2**.*

## **AT THE END OF THE DISCUSSION**

Before next time, use the HOME STUDY section in your *Study Guide* to help you as you continue to read through Mark.