

Life Group Study Notes

Uniquely Jesus

September 25, 2016

Mark 2

As we saw last week, in chapter 1, Mark presents Jesus as a unique person, with extraordinary ability in teaching, in healing of illnesses, and in freeing people from the control of and oppression by evil spirits.

What astounded people about Jesus is how his teaching made sense of life and how his commands, whether to a disease or an evil spirit, were obeyed.

Coffee/Question: In your opinion is Jesus perceived by people in Canada as being a person of extraordinary ability? Why do you think that is?

In chapter 2, Mark continues to present, to his readers, Jesus' extraordinary person and abilities. Read **2:1-12**.

After calling Peter and Andrew, James and John to follow him, 1:21 says, "*They went to Capernaum.*" After an incredible day of teaching and healing there, Jesus left to visit nearby villages.

A few days later, **2:1**, Jesus returned to Capernaum. Why did he come back? "*...he had come home.*" Capernaum was Jesus' home. When word spread that he was at his home, large numbers of people gathered at his house.

The great crowd that gathered is not the emphasis of this story. Neither is it the commitment, ingenuity or audacity of the men who carried the paralytic to Jesus. It isn't Jesus' non-reaction to them tearing a hole in his roof. Nor was it not the reaction of the teachers of the law, who listening to Jesus, thought in their minds – '*he's blaspheming.*'

The emphasis of this story is very much upon the need and response of the paralyzed man... and the ability of Jesus.

Everyone present that day would have agreed on what that man's need was. So why then did Jesus say to him, after his friends lowered him down through the roof, **"Son, your sins are forgiven?"**

In addition to seeing the man's physical need, Jesus saw into his soul. And the need for his soul to be healed, was the greater need.

What did those words, *"Son, your sins are forgiven,"* say about who Jesus is? The religious leaders were right when they thought, *"Only God can forgive sins."* But there was even more to it.

In that time a Jewish person would deal with personal sin, by going to the temple in Jerusalem to confess their sin and make a sacrifice in order to receive forgiveness from God for the sin they had committed.

Why the Temple?

The Jewish people believed the temple was the one place on earth where heaven and earth intersected.

God had promised his presence would be there, in the holy of holies, between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant.

If someone wanted to meet with God, they went... to the Temple.

By speaking words of forgiveness to that young man, Jesus announced that he is now the place where heaven and earth intersect.

The Temple had been a signpost pointing ahead to Jesus.

But now that Jesus had come, it was **no longer needed** – it had served its purpose.

There were more cataclysmic changes Jesus announced.

Listen to the question he asked of those teachers:

"Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'"

Jesus answered his own question: *"But I want you to know..."*

Know what?

*"...that **the Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sin."*

While this title may not register with us, it shocked those there that day.

"The Son of Man" was a Messianic title, used by Daniel in 7:13-14:

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

In Daniel's vision the Ancient of Days gave authority to 'the son of man' in order to dispense God's justice. Jesus announced that his **authority to forgive** this man's sin is because he is the Messiah, "the Son of Man."

After turning away to speak to the teachers of the law, Jesus looked again at the man and said: "Get up...and go home."

It wasn't just his friends who had faith in Jesus.

Jesus asked him to do the one thing he couldn't do – get up.

How does a paralyzed man "get up?"

As he by faith responded to Jesus' command, his willingness encountered power from heaven.

Has this story changed your thinking about how our troubles can be used by God?

How has a hard time been used for good in your life?

What does it say about human beings that it takes difficulties to bring us to Jesus?

Think about the prayers you make. How often do you pray for healing of physical illnesses versus healing of diseases of the soul? If you pray for one more than the other, why do you think that is?

The reaction of those who saw this happen is important for us to note:

v.12 – *we have never seen anything like this!*

Jesus was seen by them as a person of extraordinary ability.

Whatever he did, he did well.

We will come back to this shortly, but we need to ask the following questions:
How did Jesus “see” the faith of the four men who ripped open the roof?
It’s true, their actions demonstrated their faith.
You don’t tear open someone’s roof unless you are certain of the outcome;
confident that the person below is able to do something to help your friend.

But did Jesus only see their actions or did he see more?

What about the soul need of the paralytic?
How did Jesus know this man desperately needed his sins forgiven?

What about the teachers of the law? How did Jesus know their thoughts?
And how did Jesus know he was “the Son of Man,” spoken of by Daniel?
How did Jesus know he had authority to forgive sin?

Mark does answer these questions for us.
But there are a couple more things we need to see before we look at what he
presents as the answer.

Read 2:13-17

In 63 BC, Pompey conquered Palestine for Rome.
When Jesus began his public ministry, Israel and its people had been brutally
occupied by Rome for 90+ years.

The Romans used force to accomplish their will and plans.
And their favorite tool to instill fear and to maintain control was crucifixion.
They discovered there is nothing like dead bodies hanging on crosses in public
places to remind the people how fruitless it was to resist them.

The Romans taxed all of their occupied territories.

A Roman official (known as a censor) was ultimately responsible to Rome for
collecting the revenue from a particular province.
But it was a common practice for censors to sell the right to collect tax to the
highest bidders. In Palestine the vast majority of these bidders were Jews.
Rome placed on its provinces the heavy weight of administering the Empire.
In Judea every man was to pay 1% of his annual income for income tax.
But that was not all, there were also import and export taxes, crop taxes (1/10 of
grain crops and 1/5 of wine, fruit, and olive oil), sales tax, property tax,
emergency tax, and on and on.

In Judea and Galilee, after collecting the required amount of tax for Rome, the tax collectors could keep for themselves whatever else they managed to extort. This is why the tax collectors were hated by their own people, and viewed as being the worst of the worst. <http://www.bible-history.com/sketches/ancient/tax-collector.html>

With this as background, can you imagine the stir Jesus created, when he invited **Levi, son of Alphaeus, a Jewish tax collector**, to follow him, and Levi said yes?!

Why did Jesus do this?

And why did he go to Levi's house and eat dinner with him?

And not just with Levi, but with many other sinners and tax collectors, who had said yes, when Jesus invited them to follow him.

Who else went with Jesus to Levi's house?

Look carefully at verse 15.

What does this say to us about who Jesus would have us fellowship with?

Do "sinners," do "undesirables," do people's "messy lives," make you nervous; disgust you, repel you? Be honest.

If they do, why do you think that is?

If they don't, why do you think that is?

In your estimation, what would it look like for this church to be a place where "sinners" are welcomed?

The Pharisees were religious people who lived really good and moral lives.

They were confused by what Jesus was doing.

And their confusion led them to ask the wrong question and draw the wrong conclusions about Jesus.

They asked, "Why?" when they should have asked, "Why not?"

Jesus' answer to them is incredible.

Read again [v.17](#).

What Jesus said, can be easily misunderstood.

The Pharisees viewed themselves as being spiritually and morally healthy. They thought they were righteous.

Is Jesus saying there are two kinds of people in the world – those who need him and those who don't?

I believe there was a subtle hint of sarcasm in Jesus' answer.

Years later, when it was only days before these same "righteous people" put Jesus to death, Jesus pointed out just how sick they were, and how desperately they needed his forgiveness.

Matthew 23

v.3 – they don't practice what they preach

v.5 – everything they do is done to make a good impression on others, not God

v.13 – they hinder others from entering God's kingdom

v.15 – their proselytizing leaves their converts even more lost than they are

v.16 – they are blind guides, blind fools, blind men

v.23 – they neglect what matters most – justice, mercy and faithfulness

v.25 – they are outwardly perfect and inwardly filthy

v.29 – they are not with, but against God

Jesus' point in Mark 2:17 is that he came for everyone, because everyone needs him to heal their soul from the disease of sin.

How did Jesus know to approach Levi and the rest of the sinners who ate with him that night?

Mark also answers this questions for us.

But there is one more things we need to see before we look at what he presents as the answer.

Read 2:18-20.

Fasting was a spiritual act many Jewish people practiced; abstaining from food in order to spend extended time with God.

Jesus' answer as to why his followers didn't fast, also revealed who he is.

Why would Jesus' followers fast to spend time with God... when God is physically present with them?

Jesus then used that question about fasting to explain how things would be different now that he had come.

Read 2:21-22.

* Jesus is the new cloth.

* He is the new wine.

And who he is, what he does and what he will accomplish can't be forced into forms that have served their purpose and are now old, like the temple.

And as we shall see next week, like the Sabbath.

How did Jesus know what changes were to be made?

How did he know when to say what he did and to whom?

Mark does answer this question as well as the others we've already asked.

Remember Mark doesn't give long, detailed explanations.

His approach is to show us Jesus in action, and let Jesus' actions answer our questions.

Look at **Mark 1:35**.

Very early... How early?

While it was still dark.

What did Jesus do? *He got up.*

We all do this, "get up," every day.

Mark isn't telling us anything unusual yet.

When Jesus got up he slipped out of the house.

We too, do this, every day.

We get up, we leave our house to go to work or to school or to do errands.

Jesus got up and...*went off to a solitary place.*

What did Jesus do in that solitary place? *He prayed.*

Eventually everyone else in the house where he had stayed, got up.

I'm sure they asked each other – "*where's Jesus?*" and answered, "*I don't know. He was gone when I woke up.*"

Maybe they walked around town to see if they could find him.

And then, others in town, started coming to the house, asking, "Is Jesus here?"

Mark doesn't say how much time went by, but it was sufficiently long enough... hours, in fact... that his newly called disciples, decided, *"We need to do something. Let's go look for him."*

When they eventually found Jesus, they told him what was happening in town – *"everybody is looking for you!"*

Mark's little phrase – **he prayed** – explains how Jesus not only managed to survive the gruelling pace at which he lived, but that his ability to say and to do what he said and did, was because...he spent extended amounts of time praying.

The fellowship with the Father and the Spirit was a priority for Jesus. As he listened and spoke with them, he was renewed in body and spirit. And from that conversation with them, came the direction for each day, and the assurance that they would be with him to provide all that was needed.

Have you experienced prayer renewing you, physically and spiritually? What happened?

Have you experienced when praying, God giving you direction? What happened?

* That's why when Jesus' disciples showed up, saying, *"Everyone is looking for you,"* he knew what to do: *"Let's go somewhere else – so I can preach there also. This is why I've come."* The Father and Spirit had told him the next step.

* This is why when the paralyzed man lay in front of Jesus he knew the man's sin was his greatest need, not his paralysis. The Father and Spirit had told him so.

* That's how Jesus knew the unspoken thoughts of the teachers of the law. The Father and Spirit of God told him.

* This is how Jesus knew to invite Levi and other "sinners" to follow him. And how he knew to accept Levi's dinner invitation. The Father and Spirit told him.

* It's why Jesus began to reveal, when he did, that he was the Temple and the Lord of the Sabbath. The Father and Spirit told him to do so.

Jesus was able to discern the Father and the Spirit's voice, because it was his habit, each day, to speak with and to listen to them, in extended times away from everyone else, and.... as he walked through each day.

Most of us are aware of areas in our life where we need God's help – his insight; his inner strengthening; his favor; his intervention in circumstances. It is important that we go to God and ask for his help with these things. If Jesus needed to do so, how much more us.

And here's the amazing thing.
Time spent listening to and speaking with God is not wasted time.
It's how we make each day count.
It's how we know what to do in every situation.
It's where we connect to God in order that his grace might be given to us.

Jesus' example also teaches and reminds us that we too were created for and crave God's fellowship.

When we choose to follow Jesus, we are forgiven our sins; we are given a new life; we have a new purpose – we join Jesus in his mission of “fishing for people,” like he had told the four fishermen.

But when we follow Jesus we also become... his friends.
His Father becomes our Father.
The same Holy Spirit who immersed Jesus' life with his, immerses our lives.
And he too whispers guidance into our spirit as he whispered into Jesus' spirit.

In 2 Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23 Abraham is spoken of as **God's friend**:
...Abraham your friend.
...[Abraham] was called God's friend.

In Exodus 33:11 the same is said of Moses:
The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

Were Abraham and Moses the exceptions?

Jesus said this to his followers:

John 15:14: *You are my friends... if you do what I command.*

John 15:15: *I have called you friends... for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

**Is prayer for you a monologue or a conversation?
Do you see God as a friend of yours?
If not as a friend, then what?**

**The Spirit will tug on your heart because he wants to
fellowship with you. You and I decide if we will.**

Without question we need God's direction for our lives, just like Jesus did.
And we receive that direction as we pray.
But we also need his friendship; his fellowship, his companionship.
We were created for this.
And Jesus' example, teaches us that we will experience this when we pray.

On the last Sunday night of each month, we gather to pray from 7-8pm.
I invite you to come tonight.

What has God impressed upon your heart?
Will you say yes to him?
Will you come to him and follow him?
Will you by faith receive his healing touch in your soul?

Blessing

1 Corinthians 1:9:

God...has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.