

The Gospel of Mark

Of Healing, Sinners, Storms and Parables
Chapters 2-4



Forgiveness and Healing 2:1-12

Mark brings Jesus back to Capernaum. This is Jesus home during his ministry years, which adds a little to the shock of seeing someone let down through the roof of your home while you are speaking.

 **Why do you think Jesus began by saying that the man's sins were forgiven?**

The offer of forgiveness by Jesus (5), is a source of understandable offence to the teachers of the law since forgiveness comes only from God (Ex. 34:61; Ps. 103:3; Is. 43:25; Dn. 9:9). His words bring him within the range of the accusation of blasphemy.¹

This action of Jesus', an action of good, still brings a significantly 'bad' reaction within the religious leaders. Does this say anything about how the actions of the Kingdom will be greeted by those who oppose the Kingdom?

 **See Chapter 14:60-64 What is the connection?**

 **The question posed in verse 9 is an interesting one. What do you think the answer might be?**

Jesus forgiving the man's sins has an aspect that says, 'physical healing will never be enough.' Even with those whom Jesus raised from the dead, physical healing would not be enough. It was only Jesus' own victory over death that would be the final answer to the problems of the world.

Such a statement (Verse 9-10) can only come from a man whose mind is settled. Jesus knows Himself, His mission, and His authority. For the first time in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus declares Himself to be the Son of Man with power on earth to forgive sins. His opponents fall silent before the indisputable logic and the authentic ring of a sure mind.²

¹ Donald English, *The Message of Mark : The Mystery of Faith*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 67.

² David L. McKenna and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, 60.

Tax Collectors and Sinners 2:13-17

Regardless of the reaction of the religious leaders Jesus does not turn from the path on which he has set himself. Mark now shares a picture of the people Jesus regularly spent time with – tax collectors and sinners.

What do you think the people's reaction was when Jesus calls Levi into his inner circle? Levi works for the regime that the Messiah, in the minds of the Jews, had come to destroy, the Romans. And yet Jesus asks Levi to join him.

 **What might this action of Jesus have meant for those in Rome hearing Mark's gospel for the first time?**

The idea of the *righteous* not needing a physician is not to say that there are some people who are righteous through their own works but rather there are those who **think** they are righteous through their own works.

We shouldn't miss the deeper meaning of Jesus' call to Levi. Levi had been working for the man who thought of himself as King of the Jews. Now he was going to work for someone else with royal aspirations. Mark, telling the story, is leading us up to the point where Peter, speaking for the Twelve, will declare that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews (8:29).³

The New has Come 2:18-22

Mark's gospel is one full of confrontation. As Jesus carries out his ministry Mark makes note of the times when that ministry brings Jesus into conflict with the religious system and eventually the political system.

In the Old Testament the bridegroom is an image of Yahweh himself (Ho. 2:19; Is. 54:4 ff.; 62:4 ff. and Ezk. 16:7 ff.). The image was used in the New Testament with messianic implications (Jn. 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32). Its use by Jesus therefore could carry strong hints about his own nature and role but again, not directly or obtrusively. Only the eye of faith would at this point perceive its significance.⁴

³ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 20-21.

⁴ Donald English, 72.

The old and new patches and the old and new wine and wineskins emphasize the gap that is developing between what the Jews were expecting in a Messiah and what Jesus was doing.

Jesus and the Sabbath 2:23 – 3:6

Jesus' challenge to the way in which the Pharisees interpreted the law was also a somewhat subtle announcement of who he really was, not just a prophet sent from God but one who claimed the right to re-interpret the Jewish laws.

 **Why do you think these actions and statements by Jesus produced such violent opposition?**

Jesus has made 4 very bold claims in these preceding stories;

- a) 2:7 The claim to forgive sins
- b) 2:17 The claim to be able to heal the sinners/sick
- c) 2:19 The claim to be the bridegroom
- d) 2:25 The claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath
- e)

 **What might it have meant to the man to have a shriveled hand? Does this story tell us anything of our response to people who find themselves in trouble? Does it matter if their trouble is self induced or otherwise?**

3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus is an offense to both religion and irreligion. It can't be co-opted by either moralism or relativism.⁵

Appointing the 12 3:13-19

Their task was threefold, to be with Jesus, to preach and to cast out evil spirits; witnessing, proclaiming, setting people free⁶

 **What do you think the idea of 'casting out demons' might mean for us today?**

⁵ Tim Keller, *King's Cross-The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 46

⁶ Donald English, 84.

This list of disciples began with Peter, who denied Jesus, and ended with Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Not really the most perfect bunch with whom you would want to begin the Kingdom building.

Against the Culture 3:20-35

In 1st century Greek, Roman and Jewish culture a person's identity was established by who their family was, not by what they had done. Jewish culture put all the emphasis on your place in the group not on your deeds as an individual.

For Jesus to deny his family was a very strong anti-cultural statement. What he was saying is that anybody who follows him can now find their value not in their earth hereditary but in their adoption by God as His son.

 **In the context of verses 23-28 what is the unpardonable sin? Do you think the Church has replaced this with other sins?**

Their sin is that, in the presence of God's grace in action, they have not only rejected it but ascribed it to the devil. This is their fixed position. No wonder they will not find forgiveness.⁷

The Parables Begin 4:1-34

It is difficult to improve on Vincent Taylor's definition of parables as used by Jesus. 'A metaphor or story connected with the affairs of daily life is used as an illustration of moral and spiritual truths, on the assumption that what applies in one sphere is relevant also in the others.' It is important to notice that the definition leaves room for variety within the category,⁸

This idea of something being hidden is repeated throughout Mark. Mk. 4:11f.; 6:51f.; 7:19; 8:17-21; 13:14.

⁷ Donald English, 89.

⁸ Donald English, 93.

The Sower

 **What is the factor that makes the difference to the size of the crop?**

Tom Wright sees this parable as a story in apocalyptic form – it seeks to make plain a mystery about the way in which Yahweh interacts with the world.

In the narrative logic of the parable the sower sows in three unsuccessful places, and finally succeeds with the fourth. In the tradition of cryptic second-Temple Jewish stories, the assumption should be, until we have firm evidence otherwise, that the sower is YHWH himself, and that his desire (as the sower's desire is to plant successful seed) is to establish his kingdom. The other plantings will bear no fruit, but there will be one that will yield a large and satisfying crop.⁹

Wright makes the point that this parable is in all three synoptic gospels, therefore is important, but its meaning has been debated throughout the centuries. He points to Isaiah 55:10-13 as a clue to interpreting the hidden meaning of the parable.

The Lampstand

Had Jesus been speaking today, he might have said, 'When you put on a microphone, do you then cover it with a handkerchief so you can't be heard? Of course not! Whatever is said (or sung) in secret will be broadcast to everybody!' ¹⁰

The Seeds

Both Kingdom parables speak of God doing a work which is not recognised. Jesus said there was a kingdom coming, and had arrived, but it was unlike any of the kingdom seen before and certainly unlike the kingdom Israel had been expecting.

Jesus Calms the Storm 4:35-41

The impetus for Jesus waking up and doing something was the demand by the Disciples, "Don't you care?" Maybe it was this wrong paradigm that Jesus was looking to change. The disciples

⁹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 235.

¹⁰ Tom Wright, 45.

seemed to think that Jesus care of them was shown in keeping bad things from happening to them. Jesus however makes it clear that the cup that he drinks will be the cup that they drink also. (Mark 10:39)

"It's not the quality of your faith that saves you; it's the object of your faith."¹¹

 **Of what help would this story have been to the original hearers of Mark's gospel?**

Jesus calms the storm, including the waves, and the disciples are more afraid after than they were before.

They could hardly have been ready for the reply. '*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*' The crux of discipleship is located here. They needed him to *do things*: he wanted them to trust *him*. His very presence amongst them was all that they needed to survive.¹²

Homework:

What events happen in chapters 5-7 that continue this theme of confrontation between Jesus and the religious people?

What ideas come to you about these confrontations?

¹¹ Keller, p55

¹² Donald English, 106.