

Mark 2 • The Nature of Christ's Ministry

Introduction

Twelve times Mark mentions that great crowds followed Jesus. His popularity attracted the attention of the Jewish religious leaders which, more often than not, led to disagreements and questions. In this chapter Mark provides four such disagreements which serve not just as examples of how to stand up for the Truth, but how to carry on ministry and not be sidetracked by the distraction. While Christ ministered to the needs of those around Him and accepted His Word, in effect He simultaneously ministered to the needs of those who were resistant by never failing to establish the Truth.

¹When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. ²And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. ³And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. ⁴Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷"Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? ¹⁰But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

¹²And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

[Read v.1-12]

Q: This is not a large house, just a normal family residence. With so many crowding in on it, how is it possible for the scribes to have witnessed and heard everything that took place?

A: They must have arrived earlier than the rest. They were close enough to see and hear everything, including all the Jesus was teaching leading up to the miracle.

Q: How does this stand in contrast to the four men who brought the paralytic?

A: Their only concern was to bring the man to Jesus regardless of the obstacles placed before them. Whereas the scribes in Jesus' presence seemed to be slow to hear Jesus' voice, the men were intent only on getting the paralytic into a position to hear Jesus' voice.

Q: Why is forgiveness of sins actually much more valuable than immediate physical healing?

A: Healing is only temporary and will eventually give way to death and being made accountable for sin. (Even Lazarus eventually died.)

Q: On what point are the scribes absolutely correct?

A: "...who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Point: All of Christ's miracles have the dual purpose of reinforcing His message. The greater work behind every sign is His Word. Those who were permanently healed were those who embraced the message.

Q: What is the meaning or symbolism of telling the paralytic, "pick up your pallet and go home"?

A: It represents taking up one's cross and following Jesus. It's one of the earliest teachings of crucifying the old life.

Point: The authorities held the wrong belief where Jesus and forgiveness were concerned. Because they could not accept His message, they could not accept His confirming works and therefore could not accept Him as Messiah; whereas those who accepted His message were blessed by His works and received Him accordingly.

¹³And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. ¹⁴As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

¹⁵And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. ¹⁶When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

¹⁸John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁹And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

²¹"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. ²²No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

[Read v.13-17]

Q: How were tax collectors viewed in Jewish society at this time?

A: Because they worked for Rome, and were paid a percentage of whatever they collected and therefore often over-charged people, tax collectors were viewed not simply as thieves but traitors to the nation Israel. They were considered the worst kind of sell-outs to the nation's most hated enemy.

Q: What was the definition of a "sinner" as used by the scribes and Pharisees?

A: "Sinners" were people who were Jews only according to race because they did not keep the Law and instead, from a religious point of view, lived like the Gentiles. They were considered the worst kind of spiritual sell-outs to Israel's spiritual enemies.

Q: In what way did Jesus dramatically differ from the authorities when it came to tax collectors and sinners?

A: Jesus actually fellowshiped with them.

Point: By disassociating themselves from such people, the authorities were acting in the role of God the Judge in declaring that they were already committed to hell. Therefore, unlike Jesus, they provided no opportunity to bring a sinner back to God and were ignoring the myriad of Old Testament admonitions to restore a backslidden believer. The authorities held the wrong belief where fellowship was concerned because they condemned and isolated instead of reaching out.

[Read v.18-22]

Q: First of all, if someone was strictly following the Old Testament Law, how often would they fast?

A: There is only one fast which is mandated by the Law, the annual Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16.

Q: So what does that tell us about the fasting undertaken by John's disciples and the Pharisees?

A: It's completely voluntary, something undertaken over and beyond the requirements of the Law. It's according to their own choice, not the requirements of the Law.

Point: So the issue isn't actually strict adherence to the Law, but men invoking their own choices and then presenting their own traditions as something everyone else needs to do, too.

Q: What did eating with someone mean in those days? What was the greater meaning?

A: Eating with someone was the way they sealed a solemn bond of friendship. Jesus is not merely being accused of associating with the wrong kind of people, but establishing a personal relationship with them.

Point: Previously Jesus referred to Himself as a physician; now He presents Himself as a bridegroom. In other words, the Christian life is a feast, not a funeral.

Q: The parables of the garment and wineskins have a number of meanings. How do they relate directly to the inquiries of John's disciples and the Pharisees?

A: These people wanted Jesus to compromise – to “mix” – His message and ministry with theirs, but He refused to “patch” the old but instead invoke the new. It also speaks of His choice not to compromise fellowship with the truly repentant with those who repentant only as far as it meets their new, revised definition of their traditions added to the Law.

Point: *The disciples and Pharisees held the wrong belief in not being able to distinguish the true intent of God's Word from the traditions they'd built on top of it. Their wrong application of fasting led to the overall wrong application of God's Word where personal relationships were concerned.*

²³And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. ²⁴The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

²⁵And He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; ²⁶how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?” ²⁷Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

[Read v.23-28]

Q: Which Mosaic Law is Jesus accused by the Pharisees of breaking?

A: Trick question: none. The religious authorities had added to the Law and declared those writings to be equal with the original Mosaic Law. According to their tradition, there were thirty-nine acts which were not permitted to be performed on the Sabbath, among them harvesting grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 declared it absolutely legal to eat grain from your neighbor's field, but their additional tradition over and above the Law made it illegal to do so on the Sabbath.

Q: If the Law dictated that only the priests could eat the consecrated bread (Leviticus 24:5-9), then didn't David break the Law?

A: The meeting of a human need is more important than protecting a religious practice, even one set forth in the Mosaic Law. It's a very elegant proof of the greater purpose of love to which the Law was supposed to point, not man's strict adherence to the point of nullifying love. That's what Jesus means in stating, “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*”.

Q: What is different in Jesus' example from the Law versus that used by the Pharisees?

A: Jesus was using an actual commandment given by God whereas the Pharisees were citing a rule they'd made up themselves and added on top of the Law. If the greater application of love applied to the legitimate commandments of God, how much greater it must be than a man-made rule.

Point: *The Pharisees held the wrong belief where spiritual freedom was concerned. They would let someone suffer in order to observe a tradition or religious practice rather than provide relief. Just as they did not assist in alleviating physical burdens, neither was their approach successful in addressing spiritual burdens.*

Overall Application

Q: What is the common problem exhibited by every group in this chapter which opposed Jesus?

1. They all had a basic, personal problem with the Truth.
2. They misinterpreted the Word of God, often exchanging its original intent for something man-made.
3. Because they were incapable of accepting the Word, they were incapable of accepting the signs. Therefore they could not ultimately accept Jesus as Messiah.

Q: What was the dual nature of Christ's work in each of the above situations? To whom was He ministering?

A: He was not only teaching and ministering to those who were listening to Him – those who correctly accepted the Word of God and therefore His confirming signs – but He was teaching and ministering to those who were rejecting Him by firmly establishing the truth in each instance.

Application: *How does this reflect the dual role of our own ministry? How does it meet our obligation of love to speak the truth plainly when required? How well do we see that ministry “problems” are often people invoking their own traditions or injecting outright a misinterpretation of God's Word?*