

The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 2

Mark 1:32 – Mark 2:28

The news of Jesus' miracle in the Capernaum synagogue spread throughout the countryside that afternoon announcing His return to Galilee. His miracles were not unfamiliar to the people of the region because He had visited them a year earlier. As the sun begins to set, Jesus makes His way to Peter's house. Peter's home becomes the next gathering place for all the people who are desperate to see Him.

The people of Capernaum come to Simon's house

Mark 1: ³²And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they *began* bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. ³³And the whole city had gathered at the door. ³⁴And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

As the news travels through the land, the people begin bringing their sick and demon-possessed relatives to Simon's home for healing by the Lord. Jesus does not disappoint them, nor does He allow the demons to have any ability to control the evening. Once again, Jesus knows the demons and the demons know Him.

A place to pray outside of Capernaum

Mark 1: ³⁵And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; ³⁷and they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." ³⁸And He said to them, **"Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for."**

Sometime between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM during the third watch of the following morning, Jesus awakes and slips off to spend time with His heavenly Father in prayer. As day breaks the disciples search for Him and find Him outside the city in a "lonely" place. Wanting to bring Jesus back to the needs of the people in Capernaum, He redirects their plans for the day to go elsewhere in Galilee.

Demon cleansing in all the synagogues in Galilee

Mark 1: ³⁹And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

Rather than having all the people travel to Capernaum, the Lord takes His demon-healing ministry to all the synagogues in the province of Galilee. We know nothing else about this preaching tour accept that the Lord eventually addresses the needs of a leper.

Healing the leper in Galilee

Mark 1: ⁴⁰And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." ⁴¹And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴²And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them." ⁴⁵But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Two important points draw our attention in this passage. First, after healing the leper, the Lord instructs him to tell the priest and make the proper offering. The public would never accept this man back into society without a proper offering in the synagogue. Leviticus 14 explains the proper presentation to the priest and the offering.

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, ³and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, ⁴then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. ⁵"The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. ⁶"As for the live bird, he shall take it, together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. ⁷"He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field. ⁸"The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair, and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. **Leviticus 14:1-8***

Second, the excitement of Jesus' miracles spreads through Galilee and hinders His ability to live a normal life in the cities. Remaining in secluded areas, He still receives hundreds of seekers and graciously heals them of their ailments. Finally, after many days, He returns to His home base in Simon's house.

The return to Simon's home in Capernaum – the paralytic through the roof

Mark 2: ¹And when 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, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. ³And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. ⁴And being 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. **5** And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." **6** But there were some of the scribes 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?" **8** And immediately 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? **9** Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'?" **10** "But in order 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, rise, take up your pallet and go home." **12** And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

Only God can forgive sins. How can Jesus forgive the sins of a paralytic? A greater task might be that only God can read the true heart of a man. How can Jesus read the heart of a man? Only one answer applies – He is God. Wherever Jesus settles, a crowd begins to gather, and so it is in Simon's home. The crowd includes people from all walks of life - fishermen, bakers, farmers, herdsmen, rabbis and scribes. On this occasion the scribes question in their hearts the words of Jesus. Only God could forgive the sin of this paralytic; how dare He present Himself as God. The scribes had made their way into Simon's home to pick apart the teaching of Jesus and to discover the secrets behind His miraculous healing powers. Nothing can be found in any of the Gospels to indicate that the scribes speak a single word; they do not have to speak because the Lord knows the intent and thoughts of their hearts. Jesus asks them which would be easiest, to forgive this man's sins or heal his body? In reality, Jesus does the harder thing first; He heals the unseen thoughts of the man. Secondly, He does what is easy; He heals the man's body. As God, He has every right and all the power needed to heal the body and forgive his sins.

The calling of Levi by the Sea of Galilee

Mark 2: **13** And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. **14** And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose and followed Him. **15** And it came about that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax-gatherers and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. **16** And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?" **17** And 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."

The Lord calls Levi (Matthew) and then goes to his house to fellowship. There in Levi's house, all the sinful tax collectors gather as always, but this time the house overflows with the followers of the Lord. Altogether in the house, the scribes cannot withhold their disgust and complain to the Lord's disciples. Levi had arranged the fellowship at his house and had invited all the guests. The issue of the complaints by the scribes stems from the willingness of Levi to follow the Lord. Levi in turn invites all his friends to follow the Lord, and all the friends accept the call. They all join the

crowd as disciples of Jesus, infuriating the scribes, teachers of the Law of God. Who will they teach since Jesus has taken their students away? The scribes proclaim their righteousness; the tax collectors knew their sickness and sin. They needed a physician to cure their epidemic and they found him in the Lord Jesus. Those who believe themselves to be well never seek out a physician even though they may be riddled with disease. When they finally seek the aid of a physician, the disease, most often, has taken them to death's door.

The scribes and the Pharisees remain quiet for the first eighteen months, simply enjoying the fascination with both John the Baptist and Jesus. But the ministry and message begins to strike at the root of their established rituals and they become angry with them both. Their efforts put John in prison; they have now begun questioning Jesus' ministry, seeking to catch Him in some blasphemy worthy of death. Forgiving the sins of the paralytic causes the established religious leadership to begin a constant bombardment of questions. The next question concerns the requirement of fasting.

Jesus' disciples do not fast

Mark 2: 18And John'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 do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.** 20**But 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.** 22**And no 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.**"

Evidently the call of Levi and the ensuing feast at his house occurs on one of the regular "fast" days during the week. The strictest sects of the Jewish faith, steeped in the man-made rituals of the Pharisaical law, had required its followers to fast on both Monday and Thursday of every week. Jesus' followers, huge in number by this time, break the law by feasting on a regular fast day. His three-part answer reveals the Lord's view on fasting. It should be our view too.

First, the Lord associates Himself with the bridegroom of the Old Testament prophet Hosea, who has to contend with his unfaithful wife. The Pharisees clearly understand the connotation and connection Jesus alludes to in this answer. On the surface it means nothing to today's reader, but it insults the Pharisees greatly. The Pharisees do not see themselves wayward from God as illustrated in the prophecy of Hosea. The joyous celebration of the wedding hardly seems like a time to mourn over sin committed by fasting as the Pharisees require twice a week. In His reply, Jesus associates His ministry with the faithful bridegroom who has redeemed his bride from a life of harlotry. Mourning over her sin does not belong at this celebration. One day the bridegroom will leave and the bride will mourn, but mourning should not be done during their marriage and union together.

Second, Jesus uses the illustration of the unshrunk cloth to state His opinion and chip away at the Judaic life for which He has come to bring to an end. The Lord never

instructs the Jews to fast in the Old Testament. Jews had picked up the ritual during their stay in Egypt and failed to leave it behind when they left. Like the use of an unshrunk patch on an old garment, fasting is never to become part of the New Covenant with the Lord.

Third, the Lord uses the illustration of the new wine and old wine skins to further drive home the uselessness of not only fasting, but in a greater sense, of all the rituals of the old Judaic faith. The New Covenant of the Lord never fits into the old system of ritual religion. Jesus came to do away with the old system and move to a new system. This answer angers the Pharisees and they look for another opportunity to question the Lord about breaking one of their laws, and it comes on the following Sabbath.

Eating from the grain fields on the Sabbath

Mark 2: 23 And it came about 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. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "See here, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: 26 how 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 gave it also to those who were with him?" 27 And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 "Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Once again they had caught Jesus breaking the Judaic law by picking the grain to eat on the Sabbath day. The Old Testament does not consider this act as a breaking of the Mosaic Law. The rabbis had determined that plucking the grain could be considered the work of preparing a meal on the Sabbath. The Lord's response most likely infuriates the Pharisees since He associated His hunger and need to eat with the act of King David's eating the consecrated bread of the tabernacle. Each week the priest prepared twelve round and flat loaves of bread to be placed on the sacred table in the tabernacle. The loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel and their allegiance to the Lord. After seven days the priest prepared twelve new loaves for the table and the old bread could be consumed by the priest as they did their priestly duties. One day when David and his men needed food, they asked the priest if they could eat the old consecrated bread of the tabernacle. The priest determined that David's men were holy and could eat the bread although the Sanhedrin had determined that it could be eaten only by the priest. David and his men had not broken the law of God, but they had broken the law of the religious leaders. With that as the background, Jesus makes a most astonishing and profound statement that flies in the face of the Pharisees' belief, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

To relegate the Sabbath to the welfare of mankind rather than as a holy day for God stands in direct contradiction to the centuries old teaching of the rabbis. The law would not allow a person to eat an egg laid by a chicken on the Sabbath because it involved work; how much more offensive could it be for a person to personally pull the grain and eat, let alone eat an egg when the chicken had done all the work. The

rabbis had it all wrong according to Jesus; God had given the Sabbath to man for man's welfare. Jesus would not be a slave of the Sabbath; He created and owned the Sabbath. For Jesus to call Himself the "Son of Man" means that He is the representative of man to God, as the Messiah and Lord. As Lord of the Sabbath, He and his faithful followers were holy and could rightfully eat of the grain of the field because it did not break His law. Jesus did not come to do away with the Sabbath; He came to correct the interpretation and teaching about the Sabbath. On the next Sabbath He would take the opportunity to prove His point again to the Pharisees by healing the withered hand of a man.