

# The Gospel of Mark

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## Chapter Two

### Mark 2:1-5 NAS77

*And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. (2) And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. (3) And they \*came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. (4) And 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."*

This instance shows the close relationship between the forgiveness of sin and healing. Jesus had been traveling through Galilee and has returned to Capernaum. As mentioned earlier, Jesus made Capernaum the center of His ministry in the northern part of the country as we see that He is described to be at home, which is undoubtedly the home of Peter and Andrew. He did not have any privacy here as people soon heard of His presence and gathered in great numbers so that perhaps they could be cured. We see that Jesus never let an opportunity to preach go by so He was speaking the word of God to them all. There is no mention of Him performing any miracles in the house. To better understand the event next recorded by Mark, one needs at least a basic understanding of the construction of such a house. It was usually a one-floor house with a flat roof and outside stairs leading up to the roof. The roof would have been constructed of wooden beams covered in thatch and compacted earth. The men then would have brought the man up the stairs to the roof where they dug an opening through which they could lower the pallet on which the man was lying. Luke also records this instance of a paralytic being brought to the house (5:18-26). Rather than immediately healing the paralytic, Jesus saw that God had given them faith to bring the man to Him and He told the man that his sins are forgiven. Although not all illnesses are directly present because of particular sins in the life of a person with an illness, it is clear that all deviations from perfection are because of sin that has been placed between God and man. Jesus then went directly to the separation and told the man that his sins were forgiven. He thus went directly to the greatest need of this person and all people, which is the forgiveness of sin.

### Mark 2:6-12

*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."*

The scribes viewed this action by Jesus as blaspheming as they did not know that He was indeed God. Even if they thought that Jesus might be the promised Messiah, the Jewish teachings did not allow for the Messiah to forgive sins as they was a prerogative only of God. Mark informs us that the scribes were not openly discussing what they were thinking but that Jesus could read their minds and so knew what they were reasoning about His statement of forgiving sins. Jesus then asked them a piercing question regarding which action was easier. Of course both actions are indeed impossible for men but both are possible for God. Of course nobody but God could know that the sins of that man had been forgiven so Jesus let them see the physical action of healing so that they could reason that both had been accomplished. Jesus told the man to not only rise from his pallet but also to take it up and go home. Unless someone were stone cold against God, the people would have concluded that Jesus was either God or so closely connected with Him that God would act according to the request of Jesus. They did glorify God, which was a main purpose of Jesus, but also stated that they had never seen any such actions.

### **Mark 2:13-17**

*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."*

It remains clear that Mark is emphasizing the teaching of Jesus rather than His working of miracles, although he does report some of those as well. The rabbis would often teach as they walked and it seems that Jesus was teaching in this manner also as He saw Levi as He passed by where he was in the tax office. Levi was probably his given name and Matthew was his apostolic name, meaning "gift of God". He would have been employed as a tax collector by the tetrarch of Galilee who was Herod Antipas at this time. The tax collectors were hated by the Jews because they usually were considered traitors and often extortioners. These positions were however highly sought after as a way to quickly get rich so it would have been very difficult for Levi to return to that position although it would be easy for the fishermen to return to their profession after leaving the ministry of Jesus. This party was in the house of Levi and may have been a "farewell party" he had with his fellow tax collectors. It seems that Jesus and His disciples were actually sponsoring the party to welcome him to the group and to make the point about Jesus coming to call sinners. The Pharisees seem to have originated as a group of pious Jews who first appeared during the Maccabean period. The name "Pharisee" first appeared during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-104 BC). Josephus remarks that they were a group of Jews who excelled in

conformity to the requirements of the laws. Mark reports them as asking why Jesus, a supposedly devout Jew, eat with tax-gatherers and sinners. Jesus overheard them and made a very profound reply. He first gave the analogy that physicians do not seek people to treat who are healthy but rather he will look to treat those who are physically ill. He then applies this obvious statement to the spiritual conditions of people. Jesus came to offer salvation to those who were sinners, not people who thought that they were righteous. Paul makes a similar statement: “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*” (Eph 2:4-5) God freely gives salvation to those He has chosen:

*Eph 1:3-5 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,*

This is a glorious aspect of Christianity in that nobody can do anything to earn salvation.

### **Mark 2:18-22**

*And 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?" (19) And 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."*

Mark does not specify why these people were fasting. John’s disciples could have been fasting in prayer for John being imprisoned. Only the fast of the Day of Atonement was required by law (Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27-32) but after the exile four other annual fasts were observed by Jews (Zech 7:5; 8:19). In the NT times, the stricter Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday of each week (Luke 18:12). Mark does not specify who asked this question of Jesus but it seems to be a pious question by the Pharisees. Jesus answered the question with two parables. A Jewish wedding is a joyous occasion whereas fasting was for mourning so the two events are incongruous. Jesus is the bridegroom and His disciples are the guests so it is appropriate for them to be celebrating together as long as possible. When a time comes that the bridegroom will be physically removed from their presence then there will be a time for mourning and thereby fasting.

It is likely that these two parables were given on different occasions but Mark chooses to place them together for they both relate to the question and would have been appreciated by the readers of this gospel after the death of Jesus. The readers and the people present when the parable was given would have known of this application to wineskins. Just as fasting during a wedding would be inappropriate, putting new wine either in improperly patched wineskins or old wineskins

would only function to ruin the new wine as well as the old wineskins. The teaching of Jesus was a new teaching that could not be fit into the old laws and regulations of the Jewish religion. Thus the point of this parable is the same as that taught by Jesus when He gave new wine from a new source to the people at the wedding feast (John 2:1-10).

### **Mark 2:23-28**

*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."*

It is not known when this event occurred but it seems that Mark added it here because of its relationship to the preceding verses about keeping the law. In this case it pertains to the keeping of the Sabbath and the continuing conflicts between the Pharisees and Jesus. There was no conflict with Jesus and His disciples harvesting grain for such was clearly allowed even when the field did not belong to those doing the harvesting (Deut 23:25). The objection from the Pharisees was that they were doing this “work” on the Sabbath. One of the thirty-nine acts forbidden on the Sabbath was reaping. The incident to which Jesus referred was recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 when David was not condemned for his actions even though they did legally violate the Sabbath requirement. There is some argument about Abiathar being called the high priest since at this time it would actually have been his father, Ahimelech, who was high priest. This is not viewed as important for the OT also often seems to confuse the names (1 Sam 22:20; 2 Sam 8:17).

It seems that Mark will often insert some sayings of Jesus from separate occasions to make a point and so we are not sure if Jesus actually said verse 27 at this occasion. However it is certainly from Jesus and it does fit into this occasion. The point Jesus makes is that the Sabbath was not created to be some sort of ritualistic requirement for man but was given to man as a gift to provide rest and as a mark to separate the Jews from mankind:

Exo 31:16-17 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' (17) **"It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever;** for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."

The bolding above is to illustrate that the Sabbath is between Israel and God only. Mark then adds verse 28 to make the point that Jesus is the Son of Man and that He is Lord of the Sabbath since it was given to Israel by God.