

# ***The Gospel of Mark – D-Group***

## ***Content for Fall 2021***

**Session #3 (For September 22)**  
**Mark 2:13-3:35**



During this session, we are working our way through the story of Jesus' life as Mark tells it. The metaphor we've used before is that Mark is providing us with a PORTRAIT of Jesus – a perspective that is similar to the other Gospel writers (especially Matthew and Luke), yet with his own unique emphases. In the end, it's about clarifying who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

These guides will have two basic sections:

- (1) A look at the broader text/section we are covering from Mark's Gospel**
- (2) A focus on key scenes from the broader text that are worth a closer look**

All in all, the point of these guides is to help us navigate our way through this gospel as we come to see Jesus more clearly through the portrait Mark offers.

### **The Broader Section – Mark 2:13-3:35**

*Especially when it comes to the reflection questions in this section, these are far more for your benefit if you find it helpful to jot such things down as you're reading. What matters most here in this part is actually reading the text itself.*

## **READ Mark 2:13-3:35**

### **Some quick notes on this section:**

We again see some themes already established by Mark:

- Jesus inviting other disciples, even appointing some as Apostles to extend His ministry (both while He was around and beyond).
- Jesus' popularity increasing as He performs miracles, including the casting out of demons showing His authority over all things from physical ailments to the control of evil spirits (as we saw last time, **it's the Good News of God's Kingdom breaking in to this world through Jesus as He makes right what is broken**)
- The ongoing emphasis on Jesus' identity

A new theme of controversy develops as we come to chapter 2 (more on this below).

The issue over fasting (2:18-22) – Jesus makes a couple of key points here: First, His presence as the bridegroom signals a time for joyful celebration (the GOOD NEWS of the Kingdom has arrived with Him), not sorrow. Second, you cannot squeeze Jesus and the "new" reality He has brought with Him into the "old" system. In other words, what He has come to establish represents a massive departure from the religious norms of Judaism.

*NOTE: The issue of Jesus and His relationship to the OT is far too complicated to be handled adequately here. Yet, a comment is helpful. To use Matthew's terminology (5:17ff), Jesus came to FULFILL the Law and the Prophets – representative of the entirety of the OT system. A good metaphor is this: as a blossom on an apple tree turns into the fruit itself, so with Jesus in relation to the preparation stage of the OT. When that happens, the new stage of the apple is the point, it's what the blossom is supposed to bring about. Once there, it's foolish to wish to go back to the previous stage. That doesn't mean we reject the OT; after all, it is God's Word that we should strive to read, interpret and apply as such. It does mean that we joyfully move on from the OT system of Law, sacrifices, priesthood, etc. to celebrate the fullness of what Jesus brings about (this is the point of Hebrews, for example). After all, He is the goal and completion of everything for which the OT was preparing God's people!*

So much of the controversy between Jesus and the Jewish leaders revolves around this basic point: because of who He is, He gets to be the one establishing God's heart and priorities. In their devotion to the system they adhered to, they were missing what it's all about!

Within the scene toward the end of chapter 3 (vv. 20ff), Jesus references what He calls "the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit," as it's often called the "unpardonable sin." This is another complex issue that has been the subject of much discussion. Within the context of this scene, the Jewish leaders were attributing Jesus' ability to cast out demons to the evil one. His basic explanation reveals how illogical that would be (why would one of Satan's minions undermine his work?). Jesus has come not at all in the service of the evil one, but as the One who is far stronger and even able to overpower him. The sin of the Jewish leaders was a blatant refusal to ignore what Jesus had done *by the power of God's Spirit within Him*. To attribute to the evil one what is obviously the powerful working of God is the epitome of willful unbelief.

At the end of this text, we see Jesus' earthy family. They seem embarrassed by Him, even rejecting Him as being "out of His mind." It offers an opportunity for Jesus to identify the kind of kinship that trumps even our closest of earthly relationships. For Mark's original readers who had likely experienced similar rejection from their families in order to follow Jesus, how powerful these words would be! Even if and when we are rejected by those closest to us (like Jesus was), we belong in Jesus' family – such a powerful reassurance.

***In general, what questions and/or observations do you have from reading this text?***

***What does this section teach us about Jesus and His identity?***

***APPLICATION-Centered ... what does this overall section teach us about following Jesus? For example, what are some of the instructions or commands we should live out (note if these are specific to an individual or more broadly for any follower of Jesus)? What are the Christ-like attitudes and actions this text highlights as appropriate for us to model as His followers?***

## **Key Group of Scenes – Mark 2:13-3:6**

As mentioned already, this group of scenes introduces the basic theme of CONTROVERSY between Jesus and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish religious leaders. It's a plotline that extends throughout the Gospel story, culminating in the events leading to Jesus' death (that end game even begins to develop as early as 3:6). All 4 Gospels include this ongoing tension as part of Jesus' arrival as Messiah. As it is here in this portion of Mark, the controversy regularly revolves around these issues:

- (1) Jesus' identity and resulting authority (as in 2:1-12) – His claims with evidence vs. their flat-out rejection of Him ...** He is the One who has come to heal not only diseases, but spiritually sick sinners + the Bridegroom whose presence is to be celebrated + the "Lord of the Sabbath" (the One with real authority to identify its true purpose), etc.
- (2) Jesus' basic Messianic mission ...** instead of delivering God's people from foreign occupation and establishing a geo-political kingdom, He came to accomplish something much deeper and eternal.
- (3) His basic message that undermined the prevailing structures and teachings of the ruling religious crowd (e.g. attacks against the temple system as it existed or the oral traditions that had developed as additions to the Law).**

On one level, these controversies serve Mark's purpose as they move the overall narrative along; Jesus represented a threat to the Jewish leaders, one they were determined to eliminate (again, see 3:6 for the first movement in this direction, one that continues from there). On an even greater level, these controversies contribute something valuable to our understanding of Jesus and His Kingdom. Indeed, by highlighting these differences, Mark helps us to see what truly matters to Jesus and the heart of our Heavenly Father – values, priorities, etc.

As is the case in this section of Mark, much of the conflict happened between Jesus and the Pharisees, also referred to as "teachers of the law." They were the expert scholars when it came to the Jewish Scriptures (our OT) as well as the keepers of the traditions that had developed over time (more on this once we get to chapter 7). While we have learned to view them negatively as the antagonists they were to Jesus, within a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish context, they were the devoted religious people. If you wanted to know what it meant to be religious, the Pharisees would have been the answer. If you wanted to highlight an example of committed holiness, they were the model. If you wanted to see people with priorities in the right place, they were the picture of it. **All of that is why Jesus' consistent conflict with them would have been so jarring.** In the end, with all of their religious

convictions and zeal for protecting God's Law, they missed what really mattered to Him. In these controversies, we see Jesus setting the record straight. After all, *because of who He is as God's Son, the One who has even come with God's authority*, He knows better and can establish more accurately what God values.

***What do these conflicts (2:13-17 + 2:23-28 + 3:1-6 – we could really also go back to include 2:1-12) show us about Jesus' and His priorities, especially in contrast to the religious leaders?***

Here seems to be the overarching theme: **In contrast to the Pharisaical system that ignored or even ostracized people, the way Jesus establishes is people-centric as the heart of God intends!**

Consider the way that these scenes (again, even back to 2:1-12) emphasize this:

In 2:1-12, the Pharisees were more concerned with Jesus' authorization to do what He did than they were with the amazing miracle performed for this once paralytic.

In 2:15ff, the Pharisees saw tax collectors and other such sinners as being infested with spiritual cooties; the NLT's use of the word "scum" is quite appropriate. Further, to *eat* with such people – a sign of fellowship and acceptance – not only validated them, it threatened the purity of Jesus for doing so. Jesus' words in 2:17 brilliantly thread the needle: He agrees fully with the assessment when it comes to the dire problem of sin (the diagnosis). Yet, instead of leading to a refusal to associate with such a crowd, Jesus knew that such close proximity was necessary to heal them of their spiritual sickness.

**While we are not the Healer (Jesus is!), this is a great model for our approach with "sinners." The priority should be to connect with those who are spiritually sick so that we can connect them to the One who can heal ... just as He's done for each of us!**

In 2:23ff, the basic Sabbath command led to the development of a large list with various man-made rules as to what constituted work (the specificity of these is truly absurd). Jesus' disciples violated their traditions bringing about this critique. While claiming to be the authority in determining what is appropriate on the Sabbath (as "Lord" of it), Jesus also reminds them of what truly matters with it: **God established the Sabbath principle because it's what people need** (the NLT captures this quite well). **People matter far more than a rigid obedience to the day!**

In 3:1ff, this same theme unfolds again. Instead of violating a sacrosanct tradition, doing good on the Sabbath should in no way be seen as contradictory of God's heart. *Notice especially Mark's description of Jesus' response in v. 5!*

***What are some ways being "religious" can actually undermine a proper priority on people? Reflect on what it means to practically honor what truly matters to God by valuing people.***