

## Gospel of Mark: The Beginning of Victory

*“These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” – 1 Corinthians 10:11*

This is our second study in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark chapter 2 we encounter four specific incidents in which religious leaders question what Jesus is doing. In fact they do more than question. They are clearly critical. In their eyes Jesus is wrong. Not only is he not a **good example** he’s actually a **bad example**. Yet the bad religion of Jesus is our salvation. Let’s look now at these four events.

### I. Jesus – the One who forgives sins

- a. Jesus returns to Capernaum where he presently lives – “at home” (cf. Matthew 3:13). – 2:1
- b. Jesus is proclaiming God’s word. The house (Peter and Andrew’s or his own) is full of people listening to the word.
- c. Four friends are trying to bring their friend to Jesus to be healed. It’s so crowded they can’t get through the door so they go up on the roof and remove part of it (!). They then lower their friend into the presence of Jesus.
- d. When Jesus sees their faith (not only the paralytic’s) he says to the sick man “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (2:4-5). Nothing states that this is why the friends were bringing their friend to Jesus.
- e. The religious leaders present accuse Jesus of “blasphemy” (2:7) since only God can forgive sins (Isa. 43:25; Daniel 9:9). Jesus never denies this.
- f. Jesus responds to their criticism with the statement “that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (2:10).
  1. “Son of Man” is a major title that Jesus uses in Mark’s Gospel (2:28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; 13:26; 14:21, 41,62). This is a challenging term and we must wrestle with its meaning as we go through Mark’s gospel..
  2. In the Book of Ezekiel the prophet is called “son of man.” In this context it seems to mean only one who is mortal or human (Ezekiel 3:1; 6:2; 13:1; 20:2).
  3. However in Daniel 7:13-14 (one of the few sections of Scripture written in Aramaic, the basic language of Jesus and the disciples) “Son of Man” is described as a heavenly figure to whom God gives dominion and power over all. When Jesus uses this term referring to himself at his trial before the high priest, the high priest responds with a cry of “blasphemy!” ( 14:61-63).
- g. The scene ends with Jesus’ physical healing of the paralytic. All were amazed (including his critics?). – 2:12

## II. Jesus the One who eats with tax collectors and sinners

- a. Jesus calls Levi a tax collector – 2:13
- b. Jesus goes to eat at Levi's house with "many tax collectors and sinners" (bad enough only one or two?) – 2:15
- c. Again the religious leaders criticize Jesus for the "bad company" that he keeps (cf. Ps. 1:1)
- d. Jesus responds that those who are well do not need a physician – "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Ps. 5:12; Prov.3:33 but cf. Isa. 64:6).

## III. Jesus does not fast

- a. Why don't your disciples (and you *presumably*) fast?
- b. Wedding imagery – the bridegroom – 2:18-19 (Matt. 25:1-13; John 2:1-11; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2)
- c. "and then they will fast on that day" – 2:20 – What is "that day?" – Good Friday?
- d. "new wine" – 2:22; Zech. 9:16-17; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; John 2:1-11

## IV. Plucking grain on the Sabbath – 2:23-27

- a. The disciples are picking grain on the Sabbath – 2:23
- b. The Pharisees say it is not lawful – but are they right? – What does the Bible actually say? - Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 23:25
- c. Jesus gives an example from David – 2:25-26; I Sam. 21:1-6. But does this really fit? David's men were starving in war time. That's hardly the situation of the disciples.
- d. "The Son of Man is lord even over the Sabbath." – 2:27. There is a rabbinical basis for "The Sabbath is delivered unto you and you are not delivered to the Sabbath." Jesus clearly claims authority over the Sabbath and in effect the law – Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4 – Does Jesus' fulfillment set aside the law or at least the requirements of Sabbath observance? – Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:16; Heb. 8:13

## V. Questions for us

1. How do we understand Jesus in this passage? The term "Son of Man" rather than suggesting his humanity seems to refer to his divinity (as in Daniel 7:13-14). He forgives sin without anyone asking for forgiveness. He is Lord of the Sabbath. What does this chapter tell us about the character of Jesus?
2. How is Jesus an example for us? What does it mean for us to eat with "tax collectors and sinners?" How, where and when do we do this? What are the positives and negatives of our following this example?

3. This is Ash Wednesday. How does what Jesus say relate to our understanding of fasting, especially fasting in a larger sense of things we “give up” for Lent?” There are very few passages in the New Testament where the apostles fast (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23). These are certainly positive examples. Yet there is no teaching or instruction for fasting in any of the New Testament epistles (they come into the church after the apostolic era). Is fasting still a practice for Christians today? Why or why not?
4. Is Jesus against religion? Why is it that the religious leaders of his day are so negative about him? What does that mean for us today?
5. How can we apply Jesus’ teaching about the Sabbath to our lives today?
6. What other thoughts and questions do you have?