LESSON *two*

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Mark 2:1–3:35

GETTING STARTED

Who had the most influence on your decision to become a Christian? How did that person influence you?

SETTING THE STAGE

The events of Mark 2–3 highlight the difference between the religious laws of the Pharisees and the good news that Jesus came to bring. Religion, as far as the Pharisees were concerned, was all about ritual. They cared about

doing the right things at the right time in the right way. They focused on obeying rules and regulations. They cared about appearances. They tried to work their way to God and let Him know all they were doing so He would love them.

In contrast, Jesus cared about serving others. Rituals meant less to Him than making people whole. Following the letter of Pharisaical law was not as important to Him as reaching out to the poor and needy and showing loving concern to the outcasts of society. This is why the Pharisees opposed Jesus every chance they could. It is also why they typically came away looking like cowardly, petty, unfeeling hypocrites whenever they challenged him. When it came to faith, Jesus' attitude was, "Don't tell me what you know; show me what you do."

The Pharisees "weaponized" God's commandments, along with their own intricately detailed oral traditions, and used them to spiritually browbeat the Jewish people. The laws of the Pharisees were so numerous and so exacting that no one could obey them all. No one could hope to earn God's favor through perfect obedience. No one could work their way to Him.

Jesus' message was thus a breath of fresh spiritual air. He offered freedom from the oppression of overzealous rules and regulations. He taught that faith, and not rule-following, was the key to being righteous in God's eyes. Jesus ushered in something brand new. It was something personal... and something eternal.

Exploring the Text

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man (Mark 2:1–12)

[1] And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard
that He was in the house. [2] Immediately many gathered together, so
that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the
door. And He preached the word to them. [3] Then they came to Him,
bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. [4] And when they
could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the

roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

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1. The paralyzed man thought his deepest need was to be able to walk again. Jesus, however, saw a much deeper need. What did Jesus do before He healed the man (see verse 5)?

2. The crowd that gathered to see Jesus included Pharisees, scribes, and teachers of the law—the sophisticated intellectuals of Jewish society. How did they initially respond to what Jesus was doing (see verses 6–7)? Why is their reaction to the paralytic man's healing somewhat surprising (see verse 12)?

Jesus Is Questioned by the Pharisees (Mark 2:13–22)

13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to
Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son
of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow
Me." So he arose and followed Him.

15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many
tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His
disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when
the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and
sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks
with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well
have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come
to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then
they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of
the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

[19] And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom
fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the
bridegroom with them they cannot fast. [20] But the days will come
when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they
will fast in those days. [21] No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an
old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the
tear is made worse. [22] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins;
or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the
wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

3. Levi (also known as Matthew) was a tax collector. Tax collectors were so despised in Israel that if they touched something in another person's home, that item was considered unclean. Why did Jesus chose a "sinner" like Levi to be His disciple (see verse 17)?

4. The legalists who criticized Jesus thought righteousness should be expressed through a somber attitude. How did Jesus respond to their criticism (see verses 19–20)?

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–6)

[1] And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. [2] So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. [3] And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." [4] Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. [5] And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. [6] Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

5. The Pharisees had created a list of thirty-nine sub-laws of things people couldn't do on the Sabbath. They did this just to make sure no one violated the *actual* law, which God had established for His *people's* benefit, so they would have a day of rest. What point was Jesus making when He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (see verses 3–5)?

6. The religious leaders' plot to kill Jesus begins in verse 6, which was quite early in Jesus' public ministry. So, not only did the Pharisees follow Jesus around, hoping to catch Him doing something wrong, but they were also actively plotting to destroy Him. What effect do you think their actions had on Jesus' ministry?

Jesus Is Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law (Mark 3:20–35)

20 Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so
much as eat bread. 21 But when His own people heard about this, they
went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has
Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

23 So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables:
"How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against
itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against
itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against
himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. 27 No one
can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first
binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men,
and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29 but he who blasphemes
against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal
condemnation"— 30 because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside
they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around
Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers
are outside seeking You."

[33] But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" [34] And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

7. Jesus' family (most likely his brothers) went to "take charge" of Him because they feared the stress had affected Him mentally—that He was "out of His mind" (verse 21). Which of Jesus' teachings do you think may have given them this impression?

8. In Jesus' analogy in verse 27, the "strong man" is Satan, the "house" is the devil's kingdom in this world, and the "possessions" being plundered are the victims he holds. Up to this point, how had Jesus demonstrated His power over Satan?

REVIEWING THE STORY

Try as they might, the Jewish religious leaders could not get the better of Jesus. They were shocked when they witnessed Him forgive the sins of the paralyzed man—something only God had the power to do—and silently accused Him of blasphemy. Jesus read their thoughts and demonstrated His divine power by healing the man's paralysis. They criticized Christ for spending time with sinners. They complained that His disciples didn't fast. They got offended when He healed a man on the Sabbath. They accused Him of being in league with Satan. All they accomplished, however, was to make themselves look hypocritical.

9. Why were the teachers of the law outraged when they saw Jesus heal the paralyzed man in Capernaum (see Mark 2:5–7)?

10. How did Jesus respond when the Pharisees criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners (see Mark 2:17)?

11. Most of the crowd celebrated and marveled at Jesus' ability to heal a man's withered hand. What did the Pharisees and Herodians do (see Mark 3:6)?

12. According to Jesus, how does the bond between brothers and sisters in Christ compare to the bond between biological family members (see Mark 3:34–35)?

Applying the Message

13. The friends of the paralyzed man overcame the inconvenience of the crowd, exerted themselves physically, risked embarrassment and rejection, and resorted to highly unusual methods for bringing their friend to Jesus. What will you do for a friend this week who needs to be brought to Jesus?

14. What steps can you take to strengthen your relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Reflecting on the Meaning

Jesus' healing of the paralyzed man is a heartwarming story about the power of friendship. But it is much more than that. Mark writes, "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you'" (2:5), and then He healed the man. Jesus saw into the hearts of the four men who had brought their friend to Him and rewarded their faith by doing what they wanted. The paralyzed man was healed not primarily because of his own faith but because of the faith of his friends.

The others in the house saw the earnestness, compassion, and love of the four friends. Jesus, however, looked past all that and saw their faith. These four men believed that He could make the difference in their friend's life. There was no barrier too high and no problem too great for them to overcome to bring their companion to Jesus. Christ took note of that. He looked into their hearts and saw what had motivated them to take such drastic measures. He saw their faith in His ability to intervene in their friend's suffering.

Jesus still sees into our hearts today. This may not always be a comforting thought, but it is true. He sees beyond our excuses and our defenses. He sees our hearts for what they are and knows if we have true faith in Him.

What could your faith accomplish in another person's life? Do you know someone who needs Jesus to intervene in his or her life? Do you believe Jesus can bring healing, whether it's physical, emotional, or spiritual? What are you prepared to do to bring this person into Jesus' presence? Most importantly, what will Jesus see in your heart when you do?

Journaling Your Response

What are some ways you could show your gratitude to the people who played key roles in bringing you to Christ?