

# Mark – Week 2 – Public Ministry

---

## I. JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

The scene now shifts from the Judean wilderness to Galilee as Jesus begins his public ministry. Most of the action in Mark's Gospel takes place in or around Galilee, except for Jesus' final days in Jerusalem.

**Read:** Mark 1:14-15

### A. The End of John the Baptist's Ministry

***[14] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God . . .***

The end of John the Baptist's ministry is a pivotal event which signals the beginning of Jesus' ministry - now focused in Galilee. Jesus has an earlier ministry in Judea that overlapped with John's.

John's ministry – to “prepare the way” for the Son of God – has been accomplished, and Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit for his own mission, begins **“preaching the gospel of God.”**

- The “gospel of God” is the good news of salvation which is both from God and about God.

### B. The Kingdom of God

***[15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."***

The **kingdom of God** is the most characteristic phrase Jesus uses to describe the purpose of his mission. It signifies God's sovereign rule or reign over all nations through Jesus.

Jesus' announcement that the kingdom is at hand, suggests both a present and a future reality.

- The kingdom is **already** present in the person of Jesus.

Through his mighty works it is evident that the reign of sin, Satan, disease, and death is being overthrown, as Jesus heals, forgives sin, delivers from demonic possession and even raises the dead to new life – both physical and spiritual.

At the same time the kingdom of God is “like a mustard seed;” invisible or partly veiled it is **not yet** complete, nevertheless, it is growing, and will keep growing until it reaches its consummation.

- So it is both **already** here but **not yet** reached its full maturity.

### C. Our Response

***Repent, and believe in the gospel.***

The arrival of the kingdom demands a response from us: repentance and faith. Jesus calls on us to turn back to God with all our hearts (to repent) and to believe (faith) in what he is doing in us and in the world, even though we cannot see it.

- We have to accept his message, in faith, that the kingdom of God is truly at hand.

## II. JESUS CALLS THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Why is it important for Mark to relate that, the first action of Jesus after announcing the kingdom, is to call disciples to follow him?

If the kingdom were so imminent and the inbreaking of God's rule so close at hand, why did Jesus need disciples – a community gathered around him?

Obviously there is going to be an interim stage, required for the growth of the kingdom, envisaged by Jesus and underlined by Mark.

- It is also a sign that the reign of God is first of all found in those gathered with Jesus.

## A. Simon and Andrew

**Read:** Mark 1:16-18

***[16] And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.***

***[17] And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."***

***[18] And immediately they left their nets and followed him.***

As he passes by the **Sea of Galilee** Jesus sees two brothers, **Simon** and **Andrew** going about their daily business as fishermen. He invites them to follow him and remarkably they respond **immediately**, leaving everything behind for a completely new way of life.

## B. James and John

The call of James and John is similar. They leave everything, their business and even their father Zebedee, to follow Jesus. Simon, Andrew, James and John, the first to respond to the call of Jesus, will form the inner circle of his disciples.

## C. Disciples Share Jesus' Life and Mission

***"Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men."***

In calling his disciples, Jesus takes the initiative – they do not volunteer, but once called they obey immediately and radically.

Jesus asks them to follow him, to be with him, to share his life, and to pattern their lives on his life. Being a disciple of Jesus means entering into a personal relationship with him, and thereby entering the kingdom where God reigns.

- If we are truly followers of Jesus, he will make us **fishers of men**, that is, we will share in Jesus' mission of evangelization.

In his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* dated Dec 7, 1990, Blessed Pope John Paul II said:

*I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission **ad gentes**. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: **to proclaim Christ to all peoples**.*

## D. Reflection and Application

Jesus encounters his followers as they are going about their everyday lives. Have I encountered Jesus? How have I responded? Am I carrying out my *supreme duty* by proclaiming Christ to my family, friends, and unbelievers?

## III. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

The scene shifts to the town of Capernaum, Jesus' new home and headquarters in Galilee, where Jesus encounters a man with an unclean spirit (a demon or fallen angel) while teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath.

Capernaum was also the home of Simon and Andrew (1:29).

### A. Teaching with Authority

**Read:** Mark 1:21-28

***[22] And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.***

Mark tells us that Jesus taught in the synagogue but he does not tell us what he taught. Mark is more interested in the effects of the teaching. He taught ***as one who had authority***.

- When Jesus teaches, things happen. His teaching is not just wisdom but power.

This authority and power are manifested by the first miraculous work by Jesus, in his public ministry - an exorcism.

#### IV. AN EXORCISM

**Read:** Mark 1:23-25

***[23] And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit;***

***[24] and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."***

***[25] But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"***

Jesus' teaching has the effect of exposing evil so that it can be expelled. This is the first public encounter of Jesus with a demon since the temptation in the wilderness, and the demon recognizes who Jesus is, even though his followers do not – "You are **the Holy One of God.**"

- As his first public work, the exorcism signals that the central aspect of Jesus' ministry will be a conflict with the powers of darkness.

- John's Gospel states that Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan (1John 3:8). Thus, casting out demons and freeing the captives would necessarily be one of the main aspects of his public ministry.

The evil (unclean) spirit recognizes this and asks Jesus rhetorically, **“Have you come to destroy us?”**

### **A. The Captive is Set Free**

***[26] And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.***

At this display of power Jesus' fame spreads throughout the surrounding regions of Galilee. This victory over the powers of darkness shows that the kingdom of God is being established on earth.

The unclean spirits' inability to resist the command of Jesus is shown by their exhibition of **“convulsing”** and **“crying.”**

In the Gospels, demons and unclean spirits are synonymous.

### **B. Reflection and Application**

For Mark, as for the whole NT, evil is not an impersonal force but is concentrated in invisible, malevolent beings who are bent on destroying human beings and hindering God's plan of salvation.

Many people today, including some theologians and Bible scholars, dismiss demons as being a symbolic way of describing emotional, mental, or even physical illnesses.

However, the Church has always taught that demons are real spiritual beings, fallen angels who were created by God but became evil by their own free choice (CCC 391-395).

## V. A HEALING SERVICE

The first exorcism is directly followed by the first physical healing – another manifestation of the presence of the kingdom of God.

For the Gospels, illness is closely related to demonic oppression as part of the condition of fallen humanity and a sign of Satan's domination over human beings.

Jesus came to liberate us from this satanic oppression (see Matt 12:22; Mark 9:20; 25; Luke 13:16)" [See also, *The Gospel of Mark by Mary Healy*].

**Read:** Mark 1:29-31

### A. Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law

***[29] And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.***

***[30] Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her.***

***[31] And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them.***

Simon's wife is not mentioned here, but she later accompanies him on his missionary journeys (1 Cor 9:5). Her mother, Mark tells us, is sick with a fever and the disciples **immediately** tell Jesus about her.

In those days a fever was more life threatening than in our world of modern medicine. The severity of the illness is shown by the woman's inability to serve her honored guest,

### B. Physical Contact

Jesus' healings often involve physical contact with the patient via a personal and consoling touch. **And he came and took her by the hand and lifted (raised) her up . . .**

**And the fever left her; and she served them.** At his touch Simon's mother-in-law is immediately healed and gets up and serves Jesus and his disciples.

- Mark is probably hinting that the Christian who is healed by Jesus is empowered by that healing to serve Jesus' disciples.
- Jesus has authority over illness, just as he had authority over unclean spirits.
- His healings and exorcisms are the first fruits of the coming of God's reign.

### C. Reflection and Application

What power, authority, and love are manifest in Jesus' presence!

- There is nothing – no illness, no sin, no demon – that can stand against him!

Through this healing, Mark shows us how Jesus exercised his authority through love.

He loves us so much that he became a man and entered into our weak and wounded condition, triumphing over it by giving up his own life on the cross.

- He took on our infirmities and endured our pain. Now he invites us to receive his love and healing power.
- ***He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds*** (Psalm 147:3). See also Is. 53:4-6.
- Jesus wants to heal us in the deepest way possible – by increasing our capacity to accept in faith all that he did for us on the cross.

*How am I most in need of physical or spiritual healing? Have I turned to Jesus to make me whole?*

## VI. OTHER HEALINGS AT SIMON'S HOUSE

The Sabbath is over, and it is now the next day.

Jesus has freed a man of an unclean spirit in the sight of everyone in the synagogue, and word of it has spread quickly through Capernaum.

Probably many have also heard of the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. Now others want to be healed and set free.

**Read:** Mark 1:32-35

***[32] That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.***

***[33] And the whole city was gathered together about the door.***

***[34] And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.***

### A. Jesus Heals and Delivers

Mark clearly distinguishes between the two activities of healing and deliverance: ***And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.***

Again, Jesus muzzles the demons. Why? Mark says ***because they knew him.*** That is, the demons had a supernatural knowledge; it is not a confession of faith.

Jesus does not want to be publicly identified by those who already know who he is. He wants rather a confession of faith by those who witness his works and teaching.

## B. Alone with the Father in Prayer

***[35] And in the morning, a great while before dawn, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.***

Since the people of Capernaum brought a large number of afflicted people to Jesus after sunset, Jesus' healing ministry probably continued long into the night.

Yet rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place where he prayed.

- Prayer was more important to Jesus than getting a good night's sleep.

*How important is prayer for me? What do I pray about? Do I rearrange my schedule to make time for prayer?*

## VII. JESUS' MISSION

***[36] And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, [37] and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you."***

***[38] And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out."***

***[39] And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.***

### A. Proclaiming the Kingdom

Jesus' mission is to **preach**, that is, to proclaim the coming of the reign of God (the kingdom) and to bring it about through his healings and exorcisms, and all that he will do.

***"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out."***

## VIII. JESUS CLEANSSES A LEPER

Leprosy rendered one ritually unclean, that is, unfit to enter the Temple and participate in its worship (Lev 13:1-8). Lepers also had to avoid contact with others lest they infect them and, even more important, make them ritually unclean.

They were thus isolated from society. The Mosaic law could do nothing to help a leper; it could only protect the community from the spreading of the disease.

Rabbinical tradition considered curing leprosy as difficult as raising the dead.

**Read:** Mark 1:40-45

***[40] And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."***

***[41] Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I will; be clean."***

***[42] And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.***

***[43] And he sternly charged him, and sent him away at once,***

***[44] and said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."***

***[45] But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.***

## A. Moved with Pity

Driven by his desire to be healed, a leper, ignoring all the ritual prohibitions of the Mosaic law, comes to Jesus, falls on his knees, and pleads for healing. Jesus, ***moved with pity***, reaches across the barrier that separates the clean from the unclean and ***touched him***. ***Immediately*** he is cleansed.

- Jesus, like the leper, spurns a ritual prohibition in order to meet the leper where he is – in his leprosy.
- Touching a leper made one unclean - lepers were untouchable outcasts.
- Jesus was not made unclean by touching the leper; the leper ***was made clean*** by Jesus' touch.

Some manuscripts read, ***“moved with pity,”*** while others read, ***“Becoming angry.”*** This is a deep emotional reaction by Jesus. Confronted with the evil of sickness and disease, Jesus' first reaction is a flash of anger - not directed at the leper, but at the physical evil (or evil forces) which afflict him.

Some commentators think that the man was bound by a spirit (or demon) of leprosy.

## B. The Messianic Secret

***See that you say nothing to any one . . .***

The “messianic secret” is a leading theme in Mark. Jesus frequently commands demons and men to be silent in order to conceal his identity as the Messiah (CCC 439).

- Jesus did not want to be identified with the popular conception that the Messiah would be a political or military leader.

- He also did not want people to pay more attention to his deeds than his words.

### **C. Reflection and Application**

The leper represents all people before God, defiled and stained by sin. God is righteous and holy, yet he is not distant and aloof as we sometimes think. Rather he is loving, compassionate and forgiving.

Jesus enters man's sick and sinful world. Where the self-righteous will not go, lest they be stained, Jesus goes with the power to heal.

No matter how terrible our sin or how distant we feel from God, Jesus loves us, forgives us, and wants to heal us completely. Let us seek him out with the same confidence as the leper because we believe he loves us and has compassion for us.

Let us approach him with true sorrow for our sins, yet without fear, and he will stretch out his hand and touch us.

# Jesus and the Paralytic – Mark Chapter 2

---

Up to this point, Jesus has received widespread acclaim in his public ministry but now he begins to meet with opposition. Chapter 2 and the first six verses of Chapter 3 describe rising tensions between Jesus and religious leaders culminating in some of them plotting his death.

The underlying issue is the question of Jesus' identity and authority.

## I. JESUS' AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SIN

This incident begins a series of five events which bring Jesus into mounting conflict with the authorities.

**Read:** Mark 2:1-12

***[1] And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.***

***[2] And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them.***

***[3] And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.***

***[4] And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.***

***[5] And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."***

***[6] Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,***

***[7] "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who***

***can forgive sins but God alone?"***

***[8] And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts?"***

***[9] Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?***

***[10] But 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 before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"***

## **A. Jesus Returns to Capernaum**

Jesus has been travelling from village to village in Galilee preaching the good news – the reign of God – and now returns to his home base, presumably Peter's house, in Capernaum.

The word spreads and an overflow crowd quickly gathers to hear Jesus, who is ***preaching the word to them***. ***"The word"*** by Mark's day had already become a technical word for ***the gospel***.

## **B. The Paralytic and Friends**

Four men bring a paralyzed man on a stretcher to Jesus for healing. It's so crowded that the only way they can get to Jesus is through the roof.

***And when Jesus saw their faith:*** That is, the faith of the four men who carried the paralytic. This is a lesson about community and about and about intercession for those too paralyzed to speak for themselves.

- Mark says nothing specifically about the paralytic's faith.

- Here, it is the faith of his friends that brings about the healing:

### C. My Son, Your Sins Are Forgiven

The scribes are incensed that Jesus claims for himself a prerogative that belongs only to God: the power to forgive sins - ***"Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy!"***

Why doesn't Jesus just heal the man first? For the simple reason that he goes to the root of a deeper paralysis: the interior crippling that comes from sin. Jesus links illness with sin – a biblical theme familiar to his listeners.

Illness is contrary to God's intention (or perfect will) – it is one of the evils that afflict humanity as a consequence of sin (2 Chron 26:16-21; Ps 38:2-18; 107:17).

### D. Healing and Forgiveness

This does not mean that all sickness can be attributed to personal fault, for example, the suffering of Job, who the Bible calls a righteous man. There is such thing as the redemptive suffering of the innocent.

- The fact that the man does not rise immediately on the word of forgiveness shows that healing is more than forgiveness.
- But it also shows that forgiveness is the door to healing.

### E. Which is Easier?

***Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?***

At first glance, surely it is easier to claim something about an interior state of affairs than to perform a verifiable miracle. Anyone

can say, **“Your sins are forgiven,”** but there is no way to prove or disprove that the man’s sins have been forgiven.

But the claim to work a miracle can be verified on the spot. Jesus will do what is “harder” (physical healing) as a sign of his authority to do what is “easier” (spiritual healing - forgiveness of sin).

- The physical healing is a sign that the paralytic is indeed forgiven. Those present now realize that Jesus, like God, has the power and authority to forgive sin as well as to heal.

## F. Reflection and Application

The healing of the paralytic was made possible by the deep faith of his loyal friends. How can we have faith like theirs? Faith is a gift – one for which we must pray. It is our first step toward God.

For **“without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”** (Heb 11:6).

Faith, according to the book of Hebrews, is **“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”** (Heb 11:1).

The paralytic man and his friends did not know in advance that Jesus would heal him. But they were so convinced of his power and his love, they were willing to go to great lengths to encounter God, and they did.

From a position of faith, we can come to experience the joy of knowing Christ and receiving all the blessings he wants us to have.

“Father, you know how weak our faith is. Forgive us for our doubts and fears. Give us the faith that moves mountains, the faith to witness to an unbelieving world.”

## II. JESUS CALLS LEVI (MATTHEW)

The second event which brings Jesus into conflict with the Pharisees is occasioned by the call of Levi - also called Matthew (Mt 9:9) – a tax collector, who was later named an apostle. He left everything to follow Jesus.

### A. The Pharisees

The Pharisees despised tax collectors as sinners (2:16) for several reasons:

1. Collecting revenue in Galilee involved frequent contact with Gentiles. By Pharisaic standards, this meant that collectors were exposed to the ritual defilement of the pagans.
2. Since taxes were collected for the Roman occupiers who ruled Palestine, collectors were branded as traitors to Israel's hope for national independence.
3. Collectors were sometimes guilty of extortion, exacting personal commissions above the required tax.

**Read:** Mark 2:13-17

***[13] He went out again beside the sea; and all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them.***

***[14] And as he passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.***

***[15] And as he sat at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him.***

***[16] And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his***

**disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"**

**[17] And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."**

## **B. Eating with Sinners**

**"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"**

Jesus eats a meal in Levi's house with many tax collectors and other sinners present. Table-fellowship was symbolic of personal acceptance and mutual friendship in the ancient Near East.

The label **sinners** indicates that those gathered around the table are guilty of serious sin – such as fraud, adultery, extortion, prostitution, theft and the like (see 7:21-22).

The religious authorities are scandalized that Jesus would associate with such people, especially to eat with them, and they try to discredit him as a spiritual leader (2:16).

- They avoid sinners! Jesus seeks them out!

And many tax collectors and sinners became his followers, that is, his disciples. That Jesus accepts sinners as his disciples is a sign of his power to call people to repentance and to forgive sin.

## **C. No Need of a Physician**

**"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick;"**

Jesus is a **physician** and his mission is to heal. On one level this is evident from the many cures he has performed. But the **sick** referred to here are sinners and tax collectors.

A physician who avoids all contact with the sick is not only useless, but perversely so – the mission of a physician is to the sick.

- The greatest sickness Jesus came to heal is sin.

## D. The Righteous and the Sinners

***I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.***"

The scribes and Pharisees think that they are righteous, but their confidence in their spiritual health leads them to ignore the doctor in their midst.

But who are the **righteous**, and are they not called? Is Jesus excluding the scribes and Pharisees?

In the fullest sense of righteousness, "*None* is righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10). All are sinners. The only difference is that some admit their lack of righteousness, while others do not, thus refusing Jesus messianic invitation, and his medicinal grace.

## III. FEASTING AND FASTING AND NEW WINE

### A. Background to Fasting in the OT

In Old Testament times people fasted to:

- show their repentance (Jon 3:5),
- atone for their sins (Lev 16:29; Nm 29:7),
- mourn a personal or national tragedy (1 Sam 31:13), or to
- intercede with prayer for some important need, personal (2 Sam 12:16-17), or collective (Joel 1:14).

The Pharisees fasted two days a week (Mondays and Thursdays) as a pious practice (one of the three basic practices of Jewish piety). The Mosaic Law required fasting only one day a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29).

In the following passage Jesus explains why he and his disciples do not fast. His reply reveals something new and unexpected about his identity.

**Read:** Mark 2:18-22

***[18] Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people 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, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.***

***[20] 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 piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.***

***[22] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins."***

## **B. The Bridegroom**

***Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?***

Using marital imagery, Jesus, in a veiled way, is revealing his divinity. For the Jews, steeped in the Scriptures, the imagery of the bridegroom was familiar. God had revealed his love for his chosen people as a spousal love.

***For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name*** (Is 54:5).

***And I will betroth you to me forever . . . I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD*** (Hosea 2:19-20).

Jesus is alluding to the fulfillment of that promise. The bridegroom is here, let the wedding banquet begin! Weddings are times for feasting. Jesus is the bridegroom and his followers are the wedding guests.

There can be no fasting while the bridegroom is still present. When he is taken away there will be lots of time for fasting.

### **C. New Garments, New Wine**

Jesus further illustrates the meaning of the image of the wedding feast with two other images, both based on everyday household life.

First, ***no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak.*** A patch made of new cloth would shrink during washing and pull away from the old cloth, making the tear even worse.

Second, ***no one puts new wine into old wineskins.*** Leather wineskins become dry and brittle with age. They could safely contain old wine, but new wine, still in the process of fermenting, would release gases that could burst the skins. New skins would be more elastic and could withstand the increased pressure from the gases.

- The contrast between the ***old*** and the ***new*** provides the key to understanding the sayings of Jesus..

The Old Covenant has become like an old garment and old wineskins, thus, the New Covenant can neither be sewn to the worn cloth of the Old Covenant nor poured into its brittle skins.

Jesus is bringing about the kingdom of God, a completely new life, a new way of salvation that cannot be contained within the institutions and observances of the Old Covenant.

The “new wine” is the wine of God’s abundant blessings - ultimately the Holy Spirit - that was to be poured out on Israel (Is 25:6; 55:1; Joel 4:18).

The new wine can only be contained in **fresh wineskins**, that is, human hearts transformed by the Holy Spirit (Ez 36:26):

***A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.***

#### IV. LORD OF THE SABBATH

The fourth conflict in this series tells us how Jesus understands the meaning of the law; but it goes beyond this to tell us in a new way who Jesus is.

**Read:** Mark 2:23-28

***[23] One sabbath he was going through the grain fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.***

***[24] And the Pharisees said to him, "Look, 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 was hungry, he and those who were with him:***

***[26] how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"***

***[27] And he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath;***

***[28] so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath."***

## A. Not Lawful on the Sabbath

Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field and snacking on the run – plucking some ripe grain, rubbing off the husks and eating it. This was allowed in the Law of Moses.

***When you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain*** (Deut 23:25).

The purpose for the allowance was a compassionate consideration for those who might be hungry.

However, the Pharisees indict the disciples under the law of Ex 34:21 which forbids harvesting on the Sabbath. Resolved to discredit Jesus, the Pharisees equate plucking grain with harvesting it.

## B. David, Abiathar and the Bread of the Presence

Jesus replies to their criticism with an example (***have you never read***) from the OT concerning David and his companions (1 Sam 21:2-7).

When David and his men needed food, they were given the sacred bread from the Tabernacle reserved for the priests. Should the Pharisees denounce Jesus, they would unwittingly denounce the honored King David.

The priest who provided David with the bread was Ahimelech, Abiathar's father, according to 1 Samuel 21:1, and not Abiathar himself.

Was Jesus mistaken? This apparent discrepancy causes some modern scholars to accuse Jesus of misquoting the Scriptures, although this conclusion is unnecessary. (For a detailed explanation see footnote on verse 2:26 in ICSB on Mark).

The Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 8:17 names Abiathar as the father, not the son, of Ahimelech, so there was some confusion of names even in the OT tradition, and Jesus may just have been following the tradition current in his day.

For another explanation see “*Mark – Good News for Hard Times*” by George T. Montague, S.M. – pages 40 – 41.

### C. Lord of the Sabbath

Having dealt with the criticism of what they were doing was not lawful on the sabbath, Jesus declares a deeper principle that underlies it: ***the sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.***

The whole purpose of the Sabbath was to provide physical rest and spiritual worship; to fulfill their unique privilege of living in covenant relationship with God.

The Pharisees, however, added their own stringent and minute regulations for keeping the Sabbath. Any Sabbath observance that hinders rather than enhances the fulfillment of the true purpose of the Sabbath is a contradiction to the Sabbath itself.

God designed the Sabbath to benefit his people, not to burden them (CCC 2172-73).

## Preparation for Week 3

---

- Read Chapters 2 and 3 of *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy
- Read Chapters 1 and 2 of the *IGNATIUS Catholic Study Bible* (ICSB)
- Review and answer study questions in back of ICSB for Chapters 1 and 2