

OPPOSITION
How To Study The Bible
Part 3
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Our Bible study tonight, we're looking together at the gospel of Mark. I'm convinced that the same Holy Spirit who caused these words to be written is the Spirit who makes them fresh to our heart. There is a mixture as we approach the Bible both of looking at it from the vantage point of proper study habits. But beyond that looking at it from the vantage point of a committed disciple who comes to the Bible with a heart of prayer and a request of the Lord that he who revealed by the Spirit to Simon Peter who he was "...flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven," might reveal that same Christ to us as we study the scripture.

It must always as we open the Bible be a proper combination of prayer and study. Prayer can never be a substitute for study. If it is then our spiritual life simply becomes subjective and feeling oriented and we're guided solely by impulses and sometimes ideas that are fantasy level rather than rooted in the solid ground of God's word.

But neither can study be a substitute for prayer. Less we simply become people who know a lot about a subject and do not know the Lord who gave us the subject. In the course of my life I've read people who were tremendously expert at analyzing God's word but who in their own lifestyle gave evidence of never having come in under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Somehow their discipline of study had become divorced from their commitment as a disciple to Jesus Christ. That study had become separated from prayer. The two must be joined together as we take God's word. We must always be asking as we look at God's word and let it sink afresh in our heart, What is there to apply to my life?

I pretty much have reached the point in my own Bible study where I'm not looking for new truth so to speak. That is, I'm not looking for new doctrinal insights. I understand as I read the gospels that there are certain basic givens. God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one way of salvation. The certainty of Christ's resurrection from the dead. All of these things are givens. But what I am looking for is how the Holy Spirit takes this eternal word and applies it in a fresh way to my life.

I've been amazed how over and over again as I have preached through various segments of God's word that the Lord has brought together a scripture that I've been considering that week into an intersection with where my life was at that particular moment. I don't think that's by accident. I don't think in your own personal study you'll find that by accident. But the Holy Spirit has this marvelous way of giving us at just the right moment in life what we need from his word as we approach it from the standpoint of what is there that God is saying to me? Is there anything for me to obey today? Is there any example that I am to follow? Is there any example that I am to spurn? Is there any incitement in my life that the scripture holds me to?

With that in mind as we try to do some Bible study we're of course hopefully on a personal level taking our notebook out and pencil and doing some skullduggery work first. Sort of laying out the text. Maybe like a builder before he rushes off to do construction, taking a moment to look at the blueprint so that he gets an idea of continuity and design.

We've already looked at two sections together at the first chapter of the gospel of Mark. Again Mark didn't write in chapters. He wrote in paragraph units. So probably properly we should say

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that we've already looked at the first eleven units of the thought of Mark as he expresses it in the gospel. In those eleven paragraphs he is, in a breathtaking fashion, drawn us from an introduction of the Son of God in an unfinished sentence – the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God – launched us past that into a whole introduction of all the primary actors in this stage of redemption – Christ the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, angels, Satan himself the oppose-er. Taken us past that to the three major approaches of Jesus' great Galilean campaign, which was his calling of disciples, his healing of the sick and his preaching of the good news.

By the time he is done with the first eleven paragraphs he has taken us from ground zero in our knowledge of Jesus Christ – and why I say ground zero is I think one of the things that we should do in approaching any part of the scripture is sort of take a moment and approach it as though we have never approached it before. Treat it as something totally fresh. I must do that in my own life lest what is here becomes stale and hackneyed. I want to see it anew. Mark has given us from ground zero, knowledge of Jesus Christ. In just eleven short paragraphs he has shown us the gathering momentum of Jesus' ministry which has made him so popular that within a matter of very short time his fame is so great that he can no longer even openly enter a town. But he is out in the country and people are streaming to him from every corner.

How do we get that kind of a summary? We get it as we start a new study by reviewing where we've been in the past. We do not just dive into today's reading of scripture. We need to again consider context so that we keep threading things together. Do you remember the first four paragraphs, which constitute the beginning of verse 1, the beginning of verse 2, the beginning of verse 9 and the beginning of verse 11? Those four paragraphs are called the first paragraph – the beginning of the gospel; second paragraph – John the Baptist; third paragraph – baptism; fourth paragraph – temptation. Those four paragraphs deal with the preparation and we simply name that section, tie those four paragraphs together under the title "Preparation." Then the next seven paragraphs tie together as a unit. Beginning with the gospel of God which is Jesus' teaching ministry. The Four fishermen which is his calling of the first four disciples. The Capernaum demoniac who is the first miracle that Mark records. Not the first miracle that Jesus did in his ministry – we know from the gospel of John, but the first miracle that Mark is concerned to record. Then that's followed by a paragraph called Mother-in-law, where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. Then there are Sundown Healings. So that really what Mark is giving us is a typical day in the beginning of the ministry of the life of the Lord. Beginning with the morning in the synagogue then extending in the evening hours with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, sundown healings followed by a paragraph on Pray/Preach. He's out in a lonely place early the next morning before the crack of dawn praying. The disciples come to get him. He says, we must go elsewhere. Then that section is concluded by a Leper Cleansed whom Jesus has go to the medical authorities to authenticate his healing and then be quiet about it. But he went out and told the news. In disobeying the Lord made it impossible for Jesus any more openly enter a town. He'd have to come quiet and secret into a town.

That's what we see in Mark 2. We call those seven paragraphs that begin with Gospel of God and ran right through the Leper Cleansed, we call those seven paragraphs "Opening Events."

Now we come to chapter 2. "When he returned to Capernaum after some days it was reported that he was at home. Many were gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door. [He was preaching to them, preaching the word to them.] They came

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bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men 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. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’ Some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts ‘Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus perceiving in his Spirit that they thus questioned within themselves said to them, ‘Why do you question thus in your heart? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven. Or to say, rise, take up your pallet and walk. But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ he said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you rise, take up your pallet and go home.’ And he rose, 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.’”

Those twelve verses constitute all one paragraph. If we were titling that paragraph who is it about? It’s about a paralytic. And since it is maybe easy to assume this is not the only paralytic that Jesus would have healed we perhaps could use an adjective to describe what kind of a paralytic this is. There is a word that comes right out of the text that sort of graphically tells us how he got into the room. He came through the roof. So I call this paralytic the Rooftop Paralytic to distinguish him from all the rest.

Again when you’re working with a lot of memory items it helps to have some titles that just especially stand out as linkage points. And that does it for me. I always know where chapter 2 is. Say to me Rooftop Paralytic and I know where I am in the gospel of Mark.

Why is this kind of a thing important to do? This summarizing. Because the scriptures says “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.” One of the things we want to do by committing this scripture to memory – and we can do it by shorthand like this where we summarize a whole paragraph is that we indeed take God’s word into us, which makes more mature in our Christian life, guards our life against sin and I might also add that a sequential study of God’s word protects us against heresy. I’m finding that those Christians which systematically study the word of the Lord verse by verse or paragraph by paragraph have not as a general rule been caught up in all of the kinds of crazy doctrines and wild ideas that come along in the course of any given year or decade to feed parasitically on the body of Christ. Christians who are used to thinking through God’s word and analyzing it immediately know when these kinds of strong teachings come along that seem to be the rage of the moment that those teachings simply land on a verse here and a verse there and twist something out of context and they don’t put the word of God systematically together. You have this built in defense by knowing the word of God well in your own heart.

Second paragraph, “And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, 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.” There is one word, a four letter word that stands out that identifies this paragraph by its title. It’s the name of an individual – Levi. So very clearly we can settle on “Levi” as the paragraph title here.

Then verse 15, the third paragraph in this unit of Mark. “As he sat at table at his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples for there were many who followed him. And the scribes and the Pharisees when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax

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collectors said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ 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.’” Verse 18 “Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and people came to him and said to him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast? But your disciples do not fast.’ 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. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast in that day. 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. And no one puts new wine into old wine skins. 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.’”

Probably of all the paragraphs in Mark these are two of the more difficult paragraphs to summarize with catch phrase. A lot of ideas are filtering in them. But I maybe could help us with identifying them by asking you as we look at the last paragraph that was read the paragraph beginning with verse 18 that people who comes to Jesus are concerned about what question – a seven letter word and it has to do with John’s disciples and the Pharisees. Fasting. Then in the paragraph that begins in verse 15 the criticism that is made against Jesus is he is not fasting but he is eating. So if we put those two words together we have a paragraph that is Eating and Fasting. The eating and the fasting, all the teaching in those particular paragraphs relate to those two activities.

So now already we have memorized the first 22 verses of Mark 2 by the phrases Rooftop paralytic, Levi, Eating and fasting. We have five words and we’ve memorized 22 verses.

This is part of necessary good principles of study because right principles flow out of right insights.

“One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees say to him, ‘Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ 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? How he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the presence which it as not lawful for any but the priests to eat and also gave it to those who were with him?’ He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’”

Here again there are a number of paragraph titles that could be used. When you’re doing your own paragraph titles you have to decide what you can remember best. Some people on this paragraph would choose to remember it by the phrase Lord of the Sabbath. That certainly is a tremendous term coming out of the narrative itself. I have not used that because there are a number a paragraphs in Mark that are dealing with his Lordship over the Sabbath. I instead have chosen to focus on the unusual term – I’m not sure what the NIV uses but remember in Bible study you go back to the Bible that you find is in your subconscious mind whether it’s the King James or for me the RSV or whatever. When I’m in Mark, I’ve studied Mark so much in the RSV I can’t get used to the NIV. So I go back to RSV. Do what comes naturally in that regard. There’s a word in the RSV that I love. It’s called “grainfields.” That describes where the action

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is happening and when it's happening is on the Sabbath. So I simply use the title "Sabbath grainfields." That gives the setting for the action that is being described.

Then the sixth paragraph and the last in this particular sequence is the beginning of chapter 3. "Again he entered the synagogue and a man was there who had a withered hand and they watched him to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man who had the withered hand 'Come here.' He said to him, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him."

The man could be identified by what title – he is the Man with the Withered Hand. So simply Withered Hand will do it.

So now we have six paragraph titles – Rooftop Paralytic, Levi, Eating/Fasting, Sabbath Grainfields, Withered Hand.

Now already in the gospel of Mark we have had a total of 17 paragraphs and we are through up to verse 7 of chapter 3. In 17 titles we've already got this book committed to memory.

When you just look at this section, I want to ask as I'm going along to first of all look at the section in its totality. What action is going on here? For example what is happening here that was not happening earlier in the gospel of Mark? Already in chapter 1 we have had the growth of the popularity of Jesus' ministry, a basic introduction to his approaches in ministry – the calling of the disciples, the preaching of the good news and the healing of the sick. But here in this section what has happened that has not happened up to this point? It happens in five out of the six paragraphs. There is something going on that will unify five of those six paragraphs. There's something else that what's happening here that hasn't happened before in Mark 1. Opposition. There's opposition going on. In all but the paragraph called Levi there is a challenge to him that is being announced. The challenge begins in the first paragraph, the Rooftop Paralytic, and it has become so serious by the time you have come to the end of this section to the man with the withered hand that they are now seeking to destroy him. So you have a real progression of thought that has occurred. Mark early on is showing us in the involvement of Jesus' life and ministry in Galilee that the lines were set and the opposition already had motivation for seeking to destroy him. We're going to see the grounds on which that opposition was generated.

That's the kind of thing we want to do in the study of a scripture. We want to look and try to discover what unifies this.

So we put this six paragraphs together and simply call it Opposition. Now we've had three major sections – a block of four paragraphs, a block of seven paragraphs and a block of six paragraphs. The first block of four paragraphs Preparation. The next block of paragraphs – Opening Events. The third block of paragraphs – Opposition. When you start forgetting what paragraph titles are you just go back to your overheads – Preparation, Opening Events, Opposition. Again the movement of the gospel is sinking in and you can understand what the gospel writers are doing.

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One of the things we need to do as we approach the study of scripture is to have a sanctified imagination. We can do that for a moment by putting ourselves in the room. Jesus has now silently crept back into Capernaum. Why do we say “silently”? Because 1:45 had closed by saying that Jesus could not longer openly enter a town. So if he could not openly enter a town then he had to do it discretely and quietly. He’s back in Capernaum. The minute though word gets out that he’s back in the town what happens? People file in to where he’s at. Wouldn’t you? Jesus is there in this house, reported that he was “at home.”

Which raises an interesting question. Was it his home? Was it Peter’s home? Exactly what does it mean “at home”? Mark never tells us whose home it was. But simply that he was there and there was no longer any room for anybody even around the door outside and he was preaching the word to them. And they bring to him a paralytic.

You’re in the room. You’re sitting there trying to listen to Jesus teach as gradually, overhead, the roof opens. We look here at our roof and say, someone would have to be up there with a chain saw cutting through and a long rope. We have to go back to Palestinian houses that were made out of mud and straw or tiles that could be easily lifted up. So probably what we have is there’s a space where the tiles can be lifted up. Although it would have created some noise and some ruckus this paralytic has some friends.

I know some people who are invalid who don’t seem to have any friends. But here is one person who still evidently still had a pleasant enough personality maybe that at least he had some friends.

And notice it is they who had faith that Jesus could do something for the paralytic. One of the things that I would comment on this passage is that there has been a teaching in the body of Christ in recent years that in order to experience healing for yourself you, the person in need, must exercise faith. Here is an instance in the early ministry of Jesus where the person who is ill evidently exercises no faith whatsoever. He is simply the captive of his friends and when Jesus gets done with this man he commends the faith of the four who brought him. Faith is present but it is not the faith of the sick one.

If you’re sitting there and see the stretcher, this pallet coming down, probably lowered by ropes into the room in front of Jesus your reaction as an observer sitting there is going to be “What’s going on?” You know about his power to heal especially if you had been in the synagogue in Capernaum. Who in Capernaum had not heard about the synagogue incident with the demoniac guy pitching out of his chair and screaming and being cleansed. He had told everybody. They knew about Peter’s mother-in-law and knew that Jesus had healed her. He had healed at the sundown healings when everybody was at the door and he simply came out and healed everybody and cast out all the demons. He had been preaching in the synagogues of Galilee and elsewhere, out in the open country, and healing some more. A leper had been cleansed.

So the natural reaction as you’re sitting there, the paralytic dropping down in there is going to be healed, which makes Jesus’ reaction to him all the more shocking and surprising. Because when he drops down into Jesus’ presence Jesus does not say to him, “Man, be healed!” He says something off from our vantage point if we’re sitting there, really surprising. “Man [or son] your sins be forgiven thee.”

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Why does he do this? There are some who think maybe Jesus does it because the people's expectation was that sin is by the common people often equated with illness and therefore Jesus was addressing this linkage between sin and suffering. That may well be the case. But something else may well be the case. Ask yourself the question, What kinds of sins can a paralyzed person commit that would necessitate Jesus in looking at him identifying the sin problem as a greater problem in his life than his need to walk. Certainly a person who is born by others, who is a paralytic is not going to commit the sin of bank robbery. He couldn't make it fast enough to the get away car. It's doubtful that he would have committed a sexual sin of some kind. I think one can rule out bodily assault. A lot of things we identify as sin are immediately ruled out. As a paralytic he is confined to a localized place which means the kind of sin he committed which by its very nature was mental or spiritual in nature. If you're lying ill all the time what are you doing? Maybe you could engage in blame. Blame against God who allowed this condition to happen to your life. Maybe blame toward parents who had dropped him when he was a boy and made him paralyzed. We don't know how he got paralyzed. Maybe he blamed himself because he was a victim of some stupid self-induced accident. Lying there perhaps with a lot of blame in his life. One cannot really be well even if he's physically well if he goes on living with undealt with blame. Maybe it wasn't blame that he was dealing with. Maybe as a paralytic he was dealing with what is called vicarious sin where you can't do the sin yourself but mental you participate in the sin by engrafting it into your life and wishing that you could be the participant of the sin. For example, he stayed home and watched the soap operas and wished that he could be one of the characters in the story. And all the time he is wanting to participate in something that physically he is not able to do.

Whatever it was. Whether it was blame or vicarious sin or whether it was bitterness in his life and hostility. We don't know exactly what it was. But Jesus defined his most fundamental problem as the problem of sin. So he says to him right off, "Man, your sins be forgiven you."

This is a bold statement. Because the gospel has been with us for a time we forget how very bold it is. I do not have authority nor any religious teacher have the authority to say to you, "Your sins be forgiven you." Jesus here manifests an authority, which immediately raises the hackles of the people who know the scripture. If you know the scripture you know that a mortal man cannot forgive sins. So the scribes are sitting there questioning in their heart, who is this that forgives sins? Immediately Jesus perceiving in his Spirit that they questioned him said to them, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise take up your pallet and walk.'"

Think about that. Jesus is talking to the religious leadership and he's saying to them, Which of these two things is it easier for you to do? Which was easier for them? Could they say, "Your sins are forgiven you." Did they have that authority? They didn't. They didn't have the authority, that's why they're upset that he's assuming the authority.

Could they say to people, "Rise up, take up your pallet and walk"? Could they say that? They could say it but what good would it do?

So Jesus immediately uses a sharp barb right at them. The confrontational Christ. Right away he is digging in. He's not the pasty, milquetoast, pleasant Jesus. He's going for the jugular right

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off the bat. He looks at them sharply and he says, “Which is easier for you to say?” He’s in effect, daring them to answer the question. What can you do?

When they have to be quiet, Jesus says, “That you may know that the Son of man has authority to forgive sins, I say to you, ‘Take up your pallet and walk.’” What he does is he links his power to forgive in direct association with his power to heal so that his power to heal becomes a testimony of his power to forgive sins.

When we talk about this paragraph we’re talking about the very heart of gospel. This is exactly what Jesus will do in the whole of his life, in the laying down of his life on the cross and picking it up again. He is saying, “On the basis of what I do I have authority to speak to your spiritual condition and draw you back into relationship with God. I speak to you not as a Buddha, not as a teacher, not as a prophet or a preacher. I speak to you as one who has the power of God and the works that I do are testimony to the authority that I have.” So he tells him to get up and walk, take his bedroll with him. He went out and they were all amazed and glorified God saying, “We never saw anything like this.”

And of course they had been amazed once before in Capernaum when the demoniac had been healed but at that time after their amazement they said, “What is this? A new teaching?” Now there’s a new dimension added. They are glorifying God. It is instructive to note that the first mention ever of opposition to Jesus occurred on a crux issue, the very heart of Christianity is that Jesus Christ assumes the authority alone to forgive our sins and that he has that authority. It is described, the experts in the scripture that are sitting there that say, “How can he do that?” That is the first mention of any opposition to him.

It is the ultimate opposition to Jesus that is in the world today. Who gives this man from Nazareth, who was crucified in Jerusalem, the authority to say something about your spiritual condition and my spiritual condition? Who is he that he says that he can bring us back to God and take his divine eraser over the chalkboard of sins in our life and erase it all? Who is this man? There are those who simply look at Him and say No way. Everyone must work out their own human condition. There is no panacea. There is no person from the outside who can come in and give us that kind of inward deliverance but Jesus lays claim to it and the grounds his claim on the basis of his works.

That little segment is followed by the incident of the call of Levi, which shows us that the calling of the twelve was a gradual process that went on for a number of months’ time. One of the things I mention in Bible study was that we must do correlation. That is, we must compare scripture with scripture in order to get the whole. If we look for example at Acts 1 we find that when the early church got around to selecting a replacement for Judas they made a requirement that was a requirement from all the apostles – that they had been with Jesus since John’s baptism. Which means that the ones, which eventually wind up in the select company had already begun to have some association with Jesus right from the beginning. That in the midst of that association he would after some time call them to permanentize their relationship with him. Make it permanent. Evidently Levi who had been in Capernaum and who was a tax collector was a fairly decent position in that town for one thing, it is noted in Mark that he was sitting at the tax office. We know if you take a Bible dictionary and do some work under the work “taxes” and the like and I’d recommend additional study helps to the gospel Mark would be a good Bible dictionary like the New Bible Dictionary and a good atlas and a good concordance. But there

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were different kinds of taxes that were assessed and probably the kind of taxes that Levi was involved in were toll taxes or taxes on commerce that were passing through the roads. Capernaum was kind of a key geographical center. There was a tax for example on things like a catch of fish. Or an import tax that was coming in from the trade route passing through Capernaum. People that were involved in tax collecting were not well liked by nationalist Jews. Some have suggested that Levi, being a tax collector at Capernaum, may have collected taxes from the fishermen which would have meant that he stood in a kind of adversary relationship to Peter and John and James and Andrew which would make it all the more interesting.

I would like to have had Mark tell us what the reaction was of the four disciples when Levi showed up in the company. That would be interesting. I would think that maybe there was a protest or two like “Lord, he doesn’t fit our group.” There’s always been that tendency in the body of Christ for us to get into our cozy and comfortable group of close associates who think politically the way we do. We select people who have our interests. One of the wonderful things that Jesus does is that he draws people into relationship with Him who are really different from one another. And he says, you follow me. One of the things you find about the church of Jesus Christ is you have to accept whom Jesus has called. You have to accept me and I have to accept you. I may be as different from you as night is day. But if Jesus has called me to follow him he’s put me in your company and you’re going to have to get used to my crazy sense of humor and my idiosyncrasies and foibles and political views and all of that. Because together we’re going to be the company of Jesus Christ. There is a wonderful immediacy with which Levi leaves off his business and follows the Lord, which tells us here is a person who really commanded respect and obedience.

This passes into the paragraph on eating. The scribes and the Pharisees have a criticism about Jesus. Notice how they express the criticism. If you have a question about the authenticity of the gospel look how psychologically real this comment is. Instead of going to Jesus directly with the criticism they do what you and I often do when we find fault with somebody. We don’t tell them directly. We go to somebody that’s near them and say, “What he’s doing really bugs me. I wish he wouldn’t do it.” So they go to the disciples and afflict their poor minds with a question that they themselves don’t have an answer to: Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

What’s a sinner? We have to look at that word “sinner” and assume that it only means harlots. Harlots were included. We know that from the gospels. But “sinners” was a term that embraced what we would call today non-observant Jews. People who didn’t keep kosher diets. And Galilee was notorious for this. The Pharisees had bad names for the people up in Galilee. Interesting enough it’s still in Galilee today where a lot of the non-observant Jews live as well as in the urban areas. Just an example of non-observant Jews. It is against the Old Testament for a Jewish person to eat pork. There is an official law passed by the present government of Israel that bans the raising of pork by Jewish people in Israel. But many, many Jewish people today in Israel who are non-observant Jews eat pork. Only they don’t call it pork. White meat. The government officially denies that there are White Meat farms in the country but people who have the white meat farms which were the pig farms say sure we produce so many pounds a year and it’s distributed and the government knows about this. But they just use semantics on it.

So here are the non-observant Jews who maybe in sort of a sense believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but regard all these rules of religion, this strict Sabbath keeping, the kosher diet,

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the not eating a cheeseburger for example, the mixing of meat and cheese together. All this sort of stuff. They lay that aside. They're the sinners.

Jesus right away is taking up with them and although he himself evidently kept the law and kept much of the rabbinic tradition right away he is making himself at home with people who didn't keep a kosher kitchen. And he's eating with them and that was extremely offensive to religious people. So they want to know about this.

When Jesus heard it he said to them, "They who are well don't need the doctor. But the ones who are sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners."

I ran across a person a couple of weeks ago that took verse 17 as the ground in her life that she didn't need to repent. She said "Jesus only came to save sinners and I'm a righteous person and I don't need the salvation that he has to offer and here's the proof. Jesus himself said I did not come to call the righteous but only sinner to repentance." A rather novel view of scripture. What it reflects is an inability to understand that Jesus here is employing satire in the text and is saying tongue in cheek to these people who are observant Jews but whose heart is far from observing God it's the people who are hungry for the reality of God's presence that I have really come for. The people then come along – not the scribes or the Pharisees but the people and ask a question as to why Jesus isn't more religious. People look for spiritual symbols and somehow we think that religious figures are more spiritual if they look sad. Preachers should sort of have a slump in their shoulders and a tear in their voice and a groan. Granted God does give us times of real spirit of weeping and intercession because you're around people who are carrying great needs. But Jesus didn't come into life that way. He came eating and drinking. So they want to know, why aren't you spiritual? Why aren't your disciples spiritual like the disciples of John the Baptist, the esthetic, and the disciples of the Pharisees who fast. And what the people want to do is impose. They themselves weren't keeping any kind of spiritual laws but they thought that people around Jesus ought to be more spiritual than they.

Why are they eating and not fasting? Jesus gives a great statement. It's the first reference to his approaching death. It is such a veiled allusion that it's easy to miss. "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them." One of the interesting things as you read the gospels is that some things that we assume happened early really didn't happen early at all. Jesus early on didn't say a word explicitly about his death. Had he already begun talking about his death in the early days of his ministry he'd probably have scared everybody off. If Jesus started talking to you right now about some of the plans he has yet for your life and some of the things you're going to go through you'd probably be scared. So he ladles it out to you in tablespoons and doesn't make you drink the whole gallon of the future at one time and I think that's wonderful. It would either be too rough a gallon to drink or it's going to be so exciting that we would go out of our mind with joy so he just gives us a little bit at a time. The days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from you.

Then he answers in an indirect way their question of why the disciples don't fast. He has this analogy the unshrunk cloth on the new garment and new wine in old wineskins. Both of those illustrate the same principle. Why does Jesus give this analogy? He's answering the question why his disciples don't fast. He's saying that Phariseeism and John the Baptist represent the old garment and the old wineskins. And you can't put the new thing, which I am offering within the religious containers of the past. Because the new wine I am bringing will pop them to

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smithereens. In other words Jesus is saying don't impose the methods of John or the methods of the Pharisees upon me for what I'm doing far surpasses and is different from what they are doing and the old cannot contain the new.

I might add that what Jesus says here is always good in terms of what we expect of people. One person is not like another person and we simply can't bring to that our expectations and what they should be.

Then there comes the Sabbath grain fields and Jesus recognizes as his disciples eat this grain, pluck it and eat it, that they're breaking four Sabbath laws. They're plucking the grain, they're rubbing it to knock off the chaff, they are cracking it with their teeth and they are eating it. All those are part of something you do not do on the Sabbath. You only take food, which has been prepared prior to the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples are traveling on the Sabbath. They're going for a Sabbath walk and they're hungry so they start plucking the grain. He is criticized for this and Jesus defends his action on the basis of an Old Testament precedent that David was given the bread of presence by Abiathar the high priest, a tremendous reference from David's experience in Samuel. Then Jesus goes on to say "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath so the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath is still an important issue even within orthodox Judaism today. You can go to communities in Jerusalem and there are street and there are street barricades up which forbid you to drive traffic through and you want to respect the Sabbath for them. But there are tremendous lengths to which one goes to play funny rules in keeping the Sabbath. The principle of Sabbath keeping is that you are not to work on the Sabbath. The problem with Mosaic law is interpreting it in a technological age.

Jesus back in the synagogue and we come to the other section of opposition. The first was the rooftop paralytic where Jesus had laid claim to forgive sin. And now in the synagogue he is teaching and there is a man there with a withered hand. Jesus knows that he on that occasion is being defied by the religious opposition to do something about it. They watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. Again that was part of the rules. It was part of the teaching of the rabbis that in respect to the Sabbath you could keep something if you were ill from getting worse but you could not help someone get better. Jesus knows this Sabbath mentality so they're defying him to heal on the Sabbath. So he publicly calls this man with the withered hand out. He says to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?" To us the answer seems obvious and it is because Jesus always cuts through the thicket of regulations to get to the heart of the moral principle. They were silent. However for them it was not an easy question to answer. Then Mark shows us an emotion of Jesus. One of the great things about the gospel of Mark is he shows us the powerful humanity of Jesus. "He looked around at them with anger."

This phrase "looked around" occurs only six times in the New Testament. It is a phrase, which means specifically that Jesus took a moment and literally eye to eyed everybody all across the room. Took time silently to just simply stare everybody down. The tension in those moments while he "looked around" his eyes flashing with anger, the tension was thick enough. You could have cut it, as people waited to see what he was going to do. He was angry with this kind of an attitude which put rules ahead of helping people.

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He said to the man “Stretch out your hand.” Luke does something interesting. Luke the doctor is always interested in a more correct diagnosis. So it’s Luke that’s told us that Peter’s mother in law is not just sick with a fever. She is sick with a *high* fever. And it’s Luke that has told us that the man at the end of Mark 1 didn’t simply have leprosy but he was *filled* with leprosy. He took the time to note as a doctor, he was in the terminal stages. And Luke, the doctor, is the only gospel writer who tells us which hand he stretched forward. It was his *right* hand. And it was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with Herodians how to kill him. One therefore discovers right at the outset that the hostility against Jesus is so irrational that immediately after doing an act of helping a victim of illness the thanks he gets is a plot on his life. He will walk in danger from then on in the gospel story.

Just a moment to thread some things together. There are some beautiful self-revelations of Jesus in this passage.

He has called himself “the physician.” If I am sick with a headache I can take an aspirin and hopefully it will make me better. But if my headache has deeper cause I am not going to go to a foot doctor. I am going to go to a neurological specialist. Jesus says there is a malady in the human condition that is so serious that nobody else is qualified to really look at it. He is the physician of the soul. And they who want to be well on the inside are going to need his touch as physician.

He also identifies himself by the title of “bridegroom.” This is a self-concept for himself. Which is away of showing us that Jesus strived in life as one we should find easy to love. That here is a person who has come on a great courtship venture to win us. Not to lay down a set of regulations upon us and draw us to himself by signing a contract. But one who has come on a mission of wooing us and bringing us into unity with him.

Then he shows us also that his self-concept is that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus stands over all tradition. He stands over Jewish tradition and he stands over Christian tradition as the one who cuts through and the one who speaks to us authentically the words of life.

Then the fourth term which Jesus uses of himself in this passage which is a powerful term, which he uses twice. It is the term “Son of man.” That you may know that the Son of man has authority to forgive sins... that you may know that the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. Son of man. My first impression is Jesus is simply using a phrase that describes his humanity. But Jesus, if you follow him through any of the gospels, you will find that the phrase “Son of man” is his favorite title for himself. No one ever calls him that title. It is term he always calls himself. Thirty five times in the gospel of Mark he calls himself Son of man.

What does he mean by it? Again correlation helps us. Go back to the book of Daniel and we find coming at the end of the age coming before the ancient of days God the Father, is one who is the Son of man, who is given principalities and power and authority and given thrones and kingdoms and might. What Jesus is saying is this heavenly figure that Daniel prophesied called “the Son of man” who received the eternal kingdom he, the lowly Nazarene, the man from Nazareth, he in the flesh whom no one suspects of being that Daniel 7 figure who appears before the ancient of days in the end of the age to receive all the kingdoms, that he is really that person.

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So Jesus gets by using a term that for his contemporaries for a long time had to serve as a parable. A parable conceals truth or it reveals truth. To those who didn't know who he was the word "Son of man" simply rolled like water off a duck's back. It didn't mean anything. But to those who began to know him, to us who begin to know him, we hear that term today "Son of man" and our hearts ought to light up. Because what Jesus is saying is that he who walked the shores of Galilee who healed the sick, who ministered in homes and ministered in synagogues is the God eternal who is given by the almighty Father at the end of the age all power and authority and glory. He is the Son of man to whom our allegiance is owed.

That's looking together at this great section on opposition. I trust this scripture ministers the life of Christ to you.

Lord, we call you Lord, but we also can come to you tonight and call you Bridegroom and we are the bride and you dearly love us. We come to you and call you Physician because only you can heal the inside of our life. We call you Son of man because you are the exalted one. Lord, over heaven and earth. And as we look at this segment of scripture which has focused on the growing opposition to you we want to ask in our own lives that the Holy Spirit might reveal to us any opposition that is anywhere in our heart to you. Reveal to us any area where we disagree with you. Any area where our attitudes differ from your attitudes. Any area where we are disobedient to a clear command or principle that you teach. Lord Jesus, we want all opposition in our life against you to be at an end. We want to place ourselves completely and totally under your lordship. We want to join that happy group of disciples who are following you with a joyous abandon that are learning that in life you are the Lord. Lord, speak to any opposition in our own heart towards you to your will in our life. Lord, if there are emotions in our life that we're letting kind of lay there as seedlings which are sprouting bitterness, blame, trouble for us, we ask, Lord, that you will give us your authentic power of forgiveness so that our own internal sins might be forgiven. We may be well like the paralytic whom no one would guess as we come into a room that our most fundamental problem was the problem of sin in our life and disobedience to you in the inner core of our being. But, Lord, we open ourselves up to your revealing to us our need for your forgiveness. We simply make ourselves available to you. That you might forgive us and we would receive the forgiveness you bring. We're glad also, Lord, that you are the healer of the body and even as we have looked at this scripture tonight which is witness to us of your healing power we ask that in our midst tonight as well your power would be present to heal the sick. We ask these things Lord Jesus in your name. Amen.