

Session 3: Mark 2:1–3:6

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we begin to recognize our sin, we can see Jesus as our savior and begin to obey him.

Head Change: To understand that only Jesus offers the relief all of humanity longs for.

Heart Change: To feel genuine relief through the forgiveness Jesus offers.

Life Change: To begin to obey as a result of Jesus's forgiveness.

OPEN

Think of a loved one who suffers from a serious physical injury. Imagine what life would be like for that person and family if you had the ability to heal them. Is there any reason you might refuse to heal them?

Last week we laid down the challenge to follow Jesus with our whole lives—surrendering our time, our comfort, and our expectations. But that’s not the whole story. Something sinister stands in our way—something we didn’t necessarily put there but have to deal with if we want to follow Jesus.

READ

Read Mark 2:1–3:6.

WATCH

comes down through a hole in the roof? How do you think you would have reacted to his initial statement?

For the Jewish leaders, miraculous healing in the name of God's kingdom was one thing. But *forgiveness*? That was one step too far. Here, Mark introduces the first of several opponents Jesus will face. These scribes, or teachers of the Law (v. 6), mentally objected to Jesus's statement of forgiving the man's sins. This reaction never works out well for the dissenters, since Jesus knows what they are thinking.

[Note: For further background on the Jewish religious leadership who opposed Jesus, see Go Deeper Section 1 at the end of the session.]

The onlookers expected Jesus to address the man's physical needs, but the savior who came for the lost addressed his most critical need—forgiveness of his sins.

How big of a deal is your sin to you?

In what ways does your perspective of your sin reflect God's view of it? Reflect on those you tend to minimize, ignore, or justify.

If you were able to choose, would you rather be healed physically of a life-altering ailment or illness, or forgiven your sins? Why?

By also healing the paralytic's legs and inviting him to get up and walk, Jesus confirmed his ability to heal his spiritual brokenness. As we follow Jesus's ministry, notice how often he connects the outward appearance with the inward reality.

As he pronounced healing for the paralyzed man, Jesus referred to himself in a new way: “but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” (2:10). This title would have been known by the religious leaders as a reference to Daniel’s visions, an apocalyptic image denoting *divine power*. He was not hiding his identity from the educated leadership. They knew what he was saying, and it enraged them.

What did Jesus's declaration mean for the Pharisees?

We often forget that Jesus the gentle rabbi is also the Son of Man riding on the clouds in judgment.

How do you reconcile these two characteristics of our savior?

How does understanding Jesus as the coming king inform your perception of him and your relationship with him?

[Note: For further background on the Son of Man, see Go Deeper Section 2 at the end of the session.]

Read Mark 2:13–17.

Here, Mark fast-forwards the next scene to the moment where Jesus called Levi, the disciple we know as Matthew—the author of the first gospel.

What does Levi do when Jesus tells him, "Follow me"?

Reflect on your own history with Jesus. When you first believed, how quickly did you turn from your sin to follow Jesus's ways?

Jesus then goes to Levi's house and has a meal with many "tax collectors and sinners." Now, the

Pharisees were really upset. These religious leaders threw a fit at the thought that this healer/teacher would dine with sinners. But they'd forgotten the lesson already—Jesus came to deal with that sin. Like the paralytic's sickness, he could heal sin too.

Read Mark 2:18–3:6. As you read, look for a few different things:

**First, what's the focus of Jesus's ministry?
People or theological correctness?**

**Second, who benefits from what Jesus says?
Who loses out?**

**Finally, what do Jesus's words tell you about
how God treats his people?**

The cultural references in these passages may be confusing. But if we focus on what Jesus's words and actions mean for the people who heard them originally, we'll find something important.

Did you notice that Jesus's response to the Pharisees encourages celebration and health for his disciples? Jesus makes the point that, in everyday life, we do what's appropriate for any given situation—whether it's fixing a worn-out pair of pants, or keeping food from spoiling, or eating so we don't starve, or healing the sick.

**How did the Pharisees respond to each of
Jesus's teachings?**

When those who follow Jesus recognize their sin and his ability to destroy its power, they're able to follow him into the kingdom of God. And that kingdom brings celebration and provision. As the king, Jesus can and does provide for his followers.

the rest of Mark 2. And while some scribes were Pharisees, few Pharisees were in fact scribes.

Regardless, both groups knew the Scriptures backward and forward. They devoted their lives to the very words of God yet failed to recognize God-in-the-flesh. Even worse, they also accused him of blasphemy (2:7) and plotted his death (3:6). Clearly being an expert in the things of God doesn't mean we actually know him.

Today we have more access than ever to information. With the Internet and smartphones, the Bible is at our fingertips at all times. And yet we so quickly forget that, fundamentally, we're sinners in need of a healer.

What value does easy access to Scripture have in your life?

In what ways have you found yourself acting more like a Pharisee (legalistic, graceless) despite having access to Scripture? To what do you attribute that tendency?

Take the next five minutes and spend some time praying. Confess your sins to Jesus. Admit your need for him. Ask him to reveal to you the sins that you're ignoring or forgetting. And then listen. Allow him the time to work in your heart and mind.

2. Background: The Son of Man

Jesus twice refers to himself, in today's reading alone, as the "Son of Man." This title would have been recognized by religious leaders as an allusion to the prophet Daniel, who led Israel's spiritual journey during exile. In Daniel 7:13–14,

Daniel has a vision of the apocalypse (end times) in which he saw "one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom."

By taking on this title, Jesus identified himself as divine, possessing God's own authority. As the incarnated God, his authority included mastery over spiritual issues, such as forgiving sin. No wonder the religious leaders struggled to accept what he was saying. They were not looking for God himself to visit them.

Jesus uses the title later in Mark when he refers to his suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33–34, 45; 14:21 [twice], 41); and his glorious return (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). As such, Mark's use of the term emphasizes Jesus's destiny even more than his identity. The truly human savior must suffer and die. But he is more than just a man, so he must also be raised from the dead and return in glory.

Read Daniel 7:9–18. List all the descriptions of the “son of man” in that passage.

Now read Daniel 10:16–19. What similarities do you see?

Then turn to Revelation 1:9–16. How does this passage align with Daniel?

In what ways does this depiction of Christ change or expand your view of his character and person?

How does Daniel's vision and Revelation 1 influence your prayer life?

Recalling Jesus's identity as Son of Man, pray with hope and confidence for spiritual and physical healing—yours or a loved one's.

3. Background: Origins and Practices of the Sabbath

The word "Sabbath" means "cease," "rest," "complete rest," or "desist," and occurs, in its various forms, one hundred and four times in the Old Testament alone. Though the word does not appear in Genesis, the concept of Sabbath is shown in Genesis 1:1–2:4, where God creates the world and all living things in six days, then rests on the seventh.

Exodus 20:11 clarifies that the seventh day is meant to be the Sabbath day, holy and blessed. The text implies that, because God rested on the seventh day of creation, humankind should follow his example and rest on the seventh day. But over the centuries, as Israel turned from Yahweh, they abandoned the regular practice of Sabbath. The prophets pronounced judgment on their idolatry and unfaithfulness, citing among other sins their profaning of the Sabbath.

After the exile, Nehemiah stressed the importance of the Sabbath celebration (9:14). During the intertestamental period, several hundred years before Jesus, religious leaders attempted to legislate how one must observe the Sabbath

The Sabbath regulations, as interpreted by the Pharisees, lost the intent of the Sabbath prescribed in the Old Testament. Therefore, the rules they observed were human made, not God made, and able to be broken.

The Sabbath proclaimed at creation was intended to serve mankind as a holy day, giving blessing, and observing God’s rest and restoration. Nothing of Jesus’s or his disciples’ actions in Mark 2 and 3 were contrary to the purpose and intent of the Sabbath observance. As such, Jesus was not rewriting the law, but fulfilling and clarifying the original law.

Do you observe a Sabbath—an intentional time of rest? What does it look like?

How do Sabbath rests influence your spiritual life? Your physical and emotional health?

Write down a list of steps you can take to implement a regular Sabbath.

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