

Mark Chapter Two

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

Blue = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

Green = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYZED MAN (2:1-12)

Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

- **Approach Jesus with faith and determination.**
 - Throughout the Gospels the thing that Jesus most positively responds to in those he ministers to is their faith. Similarly, in this story it is the faith of the paralyzed man's friends that Jesus recognizes. Nothing seems to draw the power out of Jesus into our lives and our situations like our readiness to believe that Christ can do something that no one else can.
 - But throughout the Gospels faith evidences itself in determination. These four men make a huge effort to get their friend close enough to Christ to be healed. Jesus has the roof of his home (yes it was his home - see verse 1) ripped open. Instead of taking offence, he sees all of their effort and determination as a sign that they really do trust in him. (As a little aside, perhaps his comment, "Your sins are forgiven" included a playful reference to the fact that this man had just broken Jesus' roof.)
 - We too need to approach Jesus with faith, believing that he is ready to extend grace and miracle-working power toward our lives. We need to learn how to get close enough to Christ in prayer and worship that he is able to minister to the depth of our lives. And we need to be ready to present other people whom we love in prayer to Jesus, asking him to work in their lives too.
- **Team together with others in bringing people to Christ.**
 - These verses serve as a metaphor of evangelism. One of the discoveries of so many Christians is that when it comes to helping our friends who don't yet know Jesus (our friends who are unforgiven and crippled spiritually), it usually takes a team effort

and a lot of determination. Here we see four men working together, motivated by their love for their friend, thinking to themselves, “If we can just get this person close enough to Jesus to hear his teaching, or maybe to experience his touch, then we’re sure his life will be spiritually transformed.”

- Don’t give up on trying to bring your unforgiven, spiritually crippled friends to Christ. They may not want to come, or be able to come to him. But God can use you - and your partnership with other Christians - to get them close enough to Christ to find their footing in him.

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things?”

- **Repent of a critical spirit.**
 - Our hearts so easily lead us astray. The question Jesus asks in verse 8 can also be translated, ‘Why do your hearts tell you to think like that?’ This describes a critical heart (or spirit): we look for what is wrong in a situation or in a person, and we find the reasons to take offence at them. In our minds it makes perfect sense that we should be concerned or offended by the way another person acts or handles a situation, but what we fail to see is our own sinful instinct in the first place to look for what’s wrong with them. A critical spirit blinds us to what Christ may be doing - and in this situation Christ was moving wonderfully in a person’s life. A common way that critical attitudes undermine what God is doing today is when some people in a church become critical of the leaders, and keep on looking for what’s wrong in the way they do things or handle situations, instead of looking at all the wonderful things God may be doing.
- **Be ready to discern (with the help of the Spirit) the heart-attitudes of people.**
 - Jesus was neither critical nor suspicious of people. However, he was discerning. In verse 5 we’re told that he discerned faith in the men. Surprisingly, as he looked at the crippled man, he saw a heart riddled with shame and guilt and knew instinctively (with the help of the Spirit, of course) that this man needed forgiveness before he needed a healed body. In verse 8 we see that “immediately Jesus knew in his spirit” what some people were thinking. This knowledge was instantaneous, supernatural and came from the Holy Spirit. He discerned a critical unbelieving attitude in people.

- We too need to be open to the Spirit giving us discernment of where people are at. We need to be ready to discern levels of faith, feelings of guilt in people, and tendencies to be critical and unbelieving. Until we know where people are at, we won't be able to minister effectively to them.

9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

- **Christ is ready to forgive your sins.**
 - People may think that their greatest need is healing, but by far our greatest need is forgiveness. Yes, we may be sick or broken physically. And we certainly need physical healing. But when we have sinned, and God is counting our sins against us, then by far our greatest need is forgiveness. Everyone would have thought all this paralytic man needed was physical healing. But Jesus knew that even more important than that, the man needed spiritual healing - the healing that comes from having our sins forgiven.
 - Everyone who trusts in Christ has their sins forgiven by Jesus. In other words, we can be totally spiritually healed. And sometimes Christ will heal us physically too. But he doesn't always. Encouragingly, if he doesn't grant us physical healing in this life, we are promised resurrection bodies for all eternity.
 - It's interesting that Jesus uses crippled-ness as a picture of our sin. Sin really does cripple us. It cripples our hearts. It cripples our relationship with God. It cripples our relationships with others. It undermines the purpose and glory of our human potential.
 - But then he uses the miracle as a picture of the forgiveness he gives. His forgiveness is instantaneous, easily received, as a result of the undeserved kindness of Christ. Jesus' forgiveness can get us on our feet spiritually. It can restore us to the life he intends for us.

BECOMING A FRIEND OF NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE (2:13-17)

Jesus calls Levi and eats with sinners

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

- Don't think any kind of person is beyond Christ's reach.
 - Jesus lived in Capernaum (see 2:1). He would go out on short-term ministry trips to the surrounding regions (as he had in 1:38). Once again he goes on a trip to the Sea of Galilee (here called "the lake") outside of his town.
 - While on this ministry trip he calls another person to be his disciple: Levi, also called Matthew. In the same way that the four previous disciples had responded immediately (see 1:16-20), so Levi decided to follow Jesus too. What's interesting about Levi is that, for whatever reason, he was a tax collector. It was his job to take tax from people and, usually keeping a portion of it, to give most of it to Herod and the Romans. This made him very unpopular, especially with the religious community who deeply despised both Herod and the Romans. That's what is so surprising for him: while everyone was judgmentally rejecting him, Jesus graciously chose him. This unexpected acceptance from and new friendship with a religious figure like Jesus must have shocked him to the core.
 - We too need to reach out to all kinds of people. No one is beyond the scope of his grace, nor beyond his power to reach.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

- Help new believers to maximise their opportunity to reach out.
 - The moment Levi chooses to receive Christ's gracious invitation he throws a dinner party and seeks to introduce all his friends to Jesus too. He chooses a celebration meal to capture the sheer joy of his new friendship with Jesus.
 - This is still true today. The people who have the most opportunity to reach others for Christ are those who have only recently received Christ themselves. This is because all their relationships are in tact. Commonly - and this shouldn't be - people seem to lose touch with and therefore lose influence with unchurched friends and family. When a person finds Christ we need to help them reach out to their friends and family as soon as possible. That's what Jesus and the disciples were doing with Levi.

16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- Graciously socialize with all kinds of people.
 - The Pharisees were religious. Jesus wasn't. He was something altogether different. Consider the difference between religion and Jesus...
 - Religion causes us to look down on the immoral. Jesus causes us to love the immoral. Religion teaches us to avoid the irreligious. Jesus calls us to befriend them. Why is this? The reason is that religion causes us to focus on the judgment of God, and his readiness to punish all those who ignore his ways. Whereas Jesus urges us to focus on the grace of God, and his readiness to lovingly, non-judgmentally reach out to those who don't yet know him.
 - The irony is that the Pharisees actually thought they were quite fine, and that sinners and tax collectors were not. They were proud, and their pride blinded them to just how sick they really were. After all, everyone is a sinner, though there are two broad categories of sinner: there are the respectable, usually religious sinners, and there are the not-so-respectable, usually non-religious sinners. The fascinating thing is that the non-religious, non-respectable sinners were the first to admit they were sinners, which is possibly why they gravitated toward the Saviour.
 - Did Jesus sin when he spent time with sinners? Of course not. He never endorsed sin in anyone, but he had a way of separating the sinner from their sin. He had a way of enjoying their company even when he didn't enjoy their lifestyle. He had of a way of being liked by them, even when he was not like them.
 - Notice that as Jesus was being a friend of sinners, he was also teaching his disciples (who were with him - see verse 16) to do the same. And he calls for the same from us.

THE NEW THING THAT CHRIST'S DOING (2:18-22)

Jesus questioned about fasting

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

- Christ's kingdom is a party.
 - God was doing something new through Jesus. For one, he was introducing a non-legalistic spirituality marked by joy. John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples rigidly fasted on set days, especially on calendar days that marked tragedies that the

Israelites of old had experienced. Their fasting was generally marked with mourning and introspective penitence. But Jesus didn't lead his disciples to fast on these days and he didn't lead them to fast rigidly.

- But why did he do this? He gives the reason in verse 19: it's generally not appropriate to fast during times of God's wonderful blessing - and his presence with them. The kingdom of God, which had come to the earth through him, was a time of wonderful, unusual blessing. The more appropriate response was joy, festivity and celebration.
- **Fasting should be at appropriate times and should be future-focused.**
 - Jesus did teach elsewhere (Matthew 6:16) that fasting is good and necessary from time to time. But here he gives two guidelines for fasting:
 - 1) Fasting should happen at appropriate times. Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom at a wedding feast. Later the church would be described as "the bride of Christ" because of Jesus calling himself the bridegroom. His love for us should be marked by joy and celebration instead of sadness and mourning. (Up until the time of Jesus' coming, fasting was always marked by sadness and mourning.)
 - 2) Fasting should be a way of inviting God's intervention in difficult times. Jesus warned that there would be difficult times for his followers in the future. These difficult times would happen when he would be "taken from them" (verse 20). (And Jesus was "taken from them" when he was arrested, for example. In a larger sense, he was "taken from them" when he returned to his Father.) Jesus was saying that there would be times where life in his kingdom would seem to face some setbacks, and challenges - and that the best thing to do then would be to fast. But this fasting was not a way of mourning the past (as it mainly was in the history of the Jews up until his coming). Rather, it was a way of inviting God's interventions in the future. Fasting then is a major expression of our dependence on God's willingness and ability to intervene with kingdom power in the unfolding story of the church.

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If they do, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 22 And people do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

- **New moves of God call for new ways of thinking, living and community-structuring.**
 - God was doing something new in the world through Jesus. It was different to anything he had done before - even different to what

he had just done through John the Baptist. The followers of Jesus were discovering a new spirituality marked with great joy, love, freedom, grace and power. Rigid disciplines and numerous religious laws and rituals were absent from the life Jesus was leading his disciples into. Life in the kingdom that Christ had launched called for totally new ways of thinking, living and structuring as God's people. Jesus gives two analogies to make this point:

1) The new cloth sewed onto the old garment; and
2) The new wine in the old wineskin. Both of these analogies make the same point: *The new thing God is doing is incompatible with the old thing that either God once did or humans introduced in the form of tradition, and if you try join God's new thing with the old thing you will probably ruin both.*

- A person who becomes a Christian needs to understand that living in Christ's kingdom is different from any other approach to life, spirituality and community. It calls for a totally different way of thinking and living, and of structuring our communities.
- This truth can also applied to the various new things that God has been doing in the church throughout history, and will continue to do. Every now and then it seems God sovereignly gives birth to a new movement in the church. These movements usually discover that if they try to neatly fit into existing structures, then both the existing structure and the new movement will be damaged. The better option is usually to create a new structure that gives unhindered expression to the new movement.

CHRIST'S LIBERATING LEADERSHIP (2:23-3:6)

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

- **Jesus sometimes claimed in coded ways to be the Messiah-king.**
 - Jesus' growing reputation was bringing him under the watchful eye of the Pharisees, who served as the religious and moral watch dogs of Jewish society.
 - The law of Moses made working on the Sabbath illegal. And picking grain was what some people did for work, so it was illegal in the eyes of the Pharisees to pick grain on the Sabbath. This is an example of what legalists so often do - they take a clear

instruction of God and they add to it. Jesus wasn't really breaking the law of Moses at all - but they accused him of doing just that.

- His response is surprising. You would think he would just say, "No we didn't break the law of Moses at all, we just broke your distorted version of the law of Moses." Instead he refers to 1 Samuel 21:1-6 where David and his men broke a ritual law (which declared it wrong for anyone but priests to eat the consecrated bread) because they were hungry. Jesus, although he had not broken a true law, seems to suggest that he could have broken a ritual law if he wanted. But how could he say this?
- The answer lies in noticing what he's doing by using this story of David eating the bread. He is putting himself on a par with David, who at the time of the story had already been marked by God as the true king and yet had not been recognized as true king. Isn't that the same situation Jesus is in - he has already been marked by God as the Messiah-king (at his baptism, see 1:11) but hasn't been recognized as the Messiah-king yet? In a sense Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah-king, but in a coded way, almost in the form of a riddle.

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.
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- **Institutions and laws are meant to benefit not repress people and society.**
 - An institution and law is an acceptable norm in society. It's either written in the law of the country, or it's just something that everyone knows to be right - even if it isn't really right. Every culture, every country, every church, every family embraces acceptable norms. Jesus, in this verse, insists that these institutions and norms must truly be for the best of the people and the society as a whole. He warned against norms and institutions that damaged and dehumanized people and society.
 - Jesus was making a radical claim - he was saying that the Sabbath (which is a kind of institution) was never meant to be a rigid law that dehumanized or deprived people of God's best for them. Rather it was meant to serve them and benefit them in certain ways. The Pharisees had forgotten that behind all of God's instructions was not a petty God who liked to assign arbitrary rules to people, but a loving Father who wanted what is truly best for his people.
 - We need to be ready to challenge man-made institutions and laws that are repressive to people and society. However, we cannot ever challenge the clearly revealed will of God that comes to us through properly interpreting the Scriptures. But we must be gracious and humane in how we guide people to apply these God-given instructions.

28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

- In Christ’s kingdom, you’re released from the Sabbath (and from the rest of the law of Moses, for that matter).
 - When Jesus called himself “the Son of man” (v28) he was referring to the Messianic figure in Daniel 7:13 who would be enthroned and usher in the kingdom. The question is, “In this coming kingdom, would the law of Moses still be binding on people?” Jesus said no. He did so by making a powerful claim: that he had a higher authority than the law of Moses. He claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath.
 - If we are in Christ’s kingdom, the law of Moses is no longer binding on us. We are now under the authority of Christ, not the law of Moses. Elsewhere the Bible shows that when Jesus died and when his Spirit was poured out, he was introducing a new kingdom where the Sabbath, along with the other 613 laws of Moses, wouldn’t be binding. Amazingly, he replaced the Sabbath with himself. He doesn’t directly state this here, but he infers it. Later this will become clear, especially in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.