

Mark 2

Mark uses prepositional phrases and adverbs repeatedly to communicate that God's work happens in the present. I frequently do not know what to do next; except for some small negligible things. Invariably, if I do that tiny thing, it leads to knowing what to do with the rest. Mark writes: "and again", or "immediately" over and over. When Jesus says "Follow me" he is not saying that the person should just re-prioritize and change the direction of his life's trajectory. He is saying: *start moving right now!* Jesus is not a drill sergeant, but Mark communicates that salvation is in the present tense, without procrastination or hedging.

Mark is so simple, and yet his simplicity pulls out the underlying purpose of all of the surrounding theology. Working on the sabbath is not the same as eating as you walk from point A to B. Unfortunately, that is how the Jews interpret it. If you are following Jesus, you are doing the healthiest thing that you can. This is not at all like spending the day harvesting wheat, like the Pharisees suggest. Judaism differs from Christianity here. The Mishna and all of its minutiae just obfuscate the simple messages in scripture.

Read Mark 2:1-12: Capernaum was more or less Jesus' base for ministry. It was where he lived as an adult. Do we ever confuse ministry success with failure? How many times have I felt like I was losing, but God was using me in unintended ways? How would we feel if we held a ministry outreach at a home and the out-of-town crowd parked on the grass, trampled the rose bushes, scratched the walls, let the dog get out, broke a keepsake sitting on a table, and then started taking an axe to make another entrance! We would be livid! We might chase them off and attribute the property damage to spiritual warfare. Not so here. If we truly want our businesses and home and career to be used by God, then it will get used...but not necessarily as we envision. We really need to manage our expectations in a more practical way.

There is a business management concept called linear programming. Linear programming mathematically discovers the pace and scale and selection of input variables needed to most effectively obtain a profit or reach some goal. In the Kingdom we can also identify factors to improve our effectiveness. These factors

will compete with other goals, such as family time, career, adequate rest, other pastimes, etc... We need to get realistic and use our blessings appropriately.

Note that Jesus does not criticize the friends of the lame man for not respecting the home. He applauds their effort by bypassing societal norms to get the man in front of Jesus.

Why did Jesus address the forgiveness of this lame man's sins instead of referring to healing him directly? Was he lame because of sin? Did Jesus want to show that he could heal and forgive? He was showing them that he is God. Being made whole is the combination of healing spiritual issues, physical ailments, and emotional issues. Jesus does not just deal with the superficial effects. He deals with the causes. That means that this man must also have had a sin issue.

Read Mark 2:13-17: Jesus came for the lost and the least. Whoever is the most savable. Unfortunately, those who are well healed are not as open to the notion. People generally have to be in discomfort to respond to the gospel.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Corinthians 1)

Tax collectors were at the bottom of the totem pole in Jewish society. They were considered to be Roman sellouts. They collected taxes from their countrymen for the occupying and rude Romans. The tax collector would profit from hiking taxes to pocket the excess. They were often rich and hated. A tax collector would be the last guy that anyone would want to hear the gospel from. Tax collectors were not typically well educated, but they had a head for numbers and had some street savvy.

Levi's friends were what the police refer to as *vice*. This includes prostitutes, alcoholics, swindlers, thieves, pornography, human trafficking, gambling, mob activity, snitches, fraud, etc... Obviously, Levi was not a self-respecting man. He was an opportunist with low morals. Would you build a ministry team from fraudsters? This is how the Calvary Chapel Church got started during the 70's. The Jesus Movement included a lot of hippies, bikers and unsavory people. God completely transformed them into good shepherds for the flock. Those people

became some of the best bible teachers out there, with large and healthy churches across the nation.

Jesus is interested in healing sinners. Unfortunately, only the down and out are interested. The critics are frequently people who are blind to their own sin.

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ² But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. (Romans 2)

Read Mark 2:18-28: Jesus was a straight shooter, and the religious leaders were crafty critics who were looking to twist the truth and ensnare him. His critics actually served to clarify what scripture means or does not mean. Their twisted words and entrapping questions actually benefit us as Jesus dismantled their intents from their words. Jesus was able to use parables to teach by comparison, and Pharisee criticisms to teach by contrast.

Jesus is not pushing into any ceremonial activities that are not applicable. John the Baptist's disciples fasted and prayed. Jesus pointed out that it makes no sense to fast to pray to the person who is standing in front of you!

Likewise, Jesus used the criticism of the Pharisees to clarify the purpose of the sabbath. It was to live a healthy life and communicate with God. Obviously, people walking with Jesus who snagged some wheat as they are walking are observing the sabbath. They are with God, and they are not harvesting the field. They are snacking as they walk.