

STUDY 4

A Friendly Saviour

Mark 2:1-17

By the end of this session, you will know and understand:

1. The healing of a paralysed man.
2. How Levi became a follower of Jesus.
3. The complaints and criticisms made about Jesus.
4. Who the critics of Jesus were.
5. How the opposition and criticism of Jesus continued to build.
6. That eventually there was a plot to destroy Him.

And you will have reflected on the possible, but not certain, connection between sickness and sin and how people today may also miss the real Jesus because He doesn't come in ways that they were expecting.

Preaching Through the Bible - Chapter 4 Mark 2:1-17

1. Jesus' friendly actions provoke criticism and hostility

Mark has introduced the preliminaries to Jesus' ministry¹, then a sample day of Jesus' early ministry² and a description of one very significant event that brought Jesus a lot of attention³.

1:1-20
1:21-39
1:40-45

What happens next is that a paralytic is forgiven and healed¹, and Levi is called to be a follower of Jesus². These incidents provoke hostility against Jesus. Mark wants us to see how such hatred arose against Jesus among the leaders of the land. It was the healed but disobedient leper of *Mark 1:45* who first caused Jesus to be well-known in the Galilean towns. Now a string of incidents bring about a charge of blasphemy³, a criticism of the people He associates with⁴, a complaint about His not fasting⁵, and an accusation of Sabbath-breaking⁶. Eventually there is sustained hatred of Jesus⁷ and a plot to destroy Him⁸.

2:1-12
2:13-17

3:2-7
2:16
2:18
2:24
3:2
3:6

Criticised for His authority to forgive

We see a Saviour criticised for His authority to forgive. Worldly men dislike Jesus' absolute claims. A miracle of healing takes place¹. A paralytic is brought to Him, and it is so difficult to get to Jesus that they break through the fragile roof to get the man to Him. It is their faith that Jesus blessed. Who should believe when a sick person is brought for healing? Anyone! It might be the person praying, it might be the sick person, but also it might be the friends of the sick person.

2:1-5

Friends' faith

"Your sins are forgiven"

Jesus does not say much about the sickness. Instead He says, "**...your sins are forgiven.**" Evidently the sick man was more worried about his sinfulness than he was about his sickness. Most people are more worried about their sickness than about their sins, but this man is concerned about his sins. Perhaps his sickness had been caused by sin. This can happen, although it is a mistake to think that all sickness is caused by sin.

Jesus is acting as if He is God.

But the main point of Mark's Gospel at this stage is the way in which Jesus' observers are offended by His words. What sort of claims are these? Jesus is acting as if He is God. He does not say "*I hope God will forgive you*". He simply gives an absolute statement ("**...your sins are forgiven.**") as if He is the one who is doing the forgiving¹.

2:6-7

A critical spirit

Jesus analyses the critics themselves. '**They were reasoning that way within themselves**'. There is a certain kind of critical spirit which uses argument and logic in order to criticise. They are searching around in their minds to find ways to criticise Jesus. What sort of reasoning is this? Are we meant to use our minds in order to criticise the works of God?

Knowledge from the Holy Spirit

Jesus knows what is happening in them. Does He have this knowledge because He is God? Or is it knowledge that comes by spiritual wisdom? I think it is the latter. It is sheer spiritual instinct, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we simply know in our spirits what is happening in the other person's life. We must be careful of suspicion, of course. Suspicion is an ugly thing, but sometimes without our having a suspicious spirit we have a knowledge of what is happening in the other person's heart. Jesus performs a miracle. It illustrates the ease with which Jesus can heal and the ease with which Jesus can forgive.

We see a Saviour criticised for His friendliness to sinners. Next, Levi is called to be a follower of Jesus¹. It is a very sudden and abrupt conversion. Jesus departs from Capernaum to the coast of the Sea of

2:13-17

3. Criticised for His friendliness to Sinners

Galilee. He is teaching multitudes about the Kingdom of God^{Ⓜ2}. He goes out *again*; He had done so once before^{Ⓜ3}. Jesus is using Capernaum as His base and going out on short missions to the surrounding areas. On one of them, He passes by Levi sitting in his toll-booth^{Ⓜ4}. Once again^{Ⓜ5}, He calls someone to full-time ministry in such a way that the person leaves his current employment suddenly and abruptly. Levi immediately answers Jesus' call^{Ⓜ6}.

Ⓜ2 2:13
 Ⓜ3 1:38
 Ⓜ4 2:14
 Ⓜ5 as in 1:16 & 1:19
 Ⓜ6 2:14

Levi's answers Jesus' call

This soon leads to Jesus having a friendly meeting with many tax collectors and sinners, that is people who were careless about the regulations of the religious leaders of the day^{Ⓜ1}. He is gathering around Him a collection of *followers*, who travel to where He is ministering to hear Him and be trained by Him.

Ⓜ1 2:1-5

Jesus gathers followers

Ordinary people

Jesus attracts the ordinary people who have few connections with the more elegant society of the religious and political leaders. This shocks the Pharisees^{Ⓜ1} who think that a good religious leader ought not to mix with such people.

Ⓜ1 2:16

Needy people

Jesus is ready with an answer^{Ⓜ1}. He is deliberately focusing on the neediest kind of people. They are the ones who need help.

Ⓜ1 2:17

Opposition from respectable religious people

It is somewhat surprising that religious people do not like God being friendly. God has a habit of breaking into circles of people and making new friends, and they are often the worst kind of people. Then older, respectable people, who come from groups that maybe a few centuries before were blessed by God, get offended. Jesus did not get opposition from tax collectors who used their job to squeeze as much money out of people as they could. Jesus did not get opposition from *sinners* who neglected the religious duties that the Scribes and Pharisees liked so much. Jesus got opposition from people who said they were God's people looking for the Messiah to come.

A friendly Saviour

Jesus is a friendly Saviour with no pretence or self-centred mannerisms that religious people sometimes have. He combines great authority with great friendliness. He used only the humblest descriptions of Himself, although He was the Son of God. He was a friendly Saviour – and He still is.

Study 4

A Friendly Saviour

Read Mark Chapter 2 verses 1 to 17

Read **Preaching Through the Bible: Mark**, Chapter 4 (or Mark Slice 4)

A. Jesus' friendly actions provoke criticism and hostility

1. A string of events brings about a charge of blasphemy:
 - a. The p..... He associates with
 - b. Not f.....
 - c. S..... breaking
2. The result is a

B. Jesus criticised for His authority to forgive

1. By now Jesus had become very w..... k.....
2. Who brought the paralysed man to Jesus?
3. How did they get their friend to Jesus?
.....
4. **True or false?**
 - a. Jesus rebuked the men for the damage they caused.
 - b. When Jesus saw their faith, He forgave their damage.
 - c. Jesus spoke kindly to the man saying that his sins were forgiven.
 - d. The teachers of the law thought Jesus' words were blasphemous^g.
 - e. Jesus challenged His critics with a question.
 - f. To demonstrate His authority to forgive, Jesus healed the man.
 - g. All sicknesses are the result of personal sin.
5. For someone to be healed, who should do the believing?

6. What is the main point of Mark's Gospel at this stage?
7. Why were Jesus' critics so offended?
8. In what wrong way were Jesus' opponents using their minds?
9. Jesus was able to read what was happening in their hearts because of a. or b.?
- a. Jesus had a suspicious spirit or
- b. Jesus had a spiritual instinct helped by the Holy Spirit
10. This story illustrates the e..... with which Jesus can forgive sins and heal.

C. Jesus was criticised for His friendliness toward sinners

1. Who had an abrupt call to be a follower of Jesus?
2. What was his occupation?
3. Did he follow immediately?
4. A group of f..... began to gather around Jesus.
5. How are they described?
6. **True** or **false**?
 - a. Jesus attracted ordinary people to follow Him.
 - b. The religious and political leaders did not follow Jesus.
 - c. The Pharisees were glad to see Jesus mixing with *sinners*.
7. Jesus' answer was, "*It's the needy people that need my help.*" Is it somewhat surprising that the people who were attracted to Jesus were not the respectable, religious people?
8. When God breaks into circles of people and makes new friends, they are often
9. Religious people often get o.....
10. To summarise, **true** or **false**? Jesus:
 - a. Has great authority.

- b. Used humble descriptions of Himself.
- c. Was and still is a friendly Saviour.

D. For further thought and discussion

1. Sometimes people use this passage to draw a connection between sin and sickness. Michael Eaton makes the point that *this can happen but it is a mistake to think that all sickness is caused by sin*. Can you think of examples to illustrate his point?
2. It is just as possible today for people to miss the real Jesus at work.
Here are some unexpected people and places you may wish to learn more about:
 - a. The revival in South American prisons where the authorities allow prisoners to run Bible study groups. Many prisoners who have been released have become Christian workers.
 - b. Former drug addicts from the street gangs of Hong Kong or New York who serve Jesus after their deliverance from drug addiction.
2. It also works the other way round. People who claim to be acting for God may not be all they seem.
 - a. Some high-profile tele-evangelists have been exposed for living lives inconsistent with their public testimony.
 - b. There are pastors who have (mis)used Biblical teaching on giving to exploit their people and to finance lavish lifestyles.
3. Sometimes *unlikely* people live in tune with the real Jesus, while people who confess Him publicly do not. Such examples raise the question – *how can we discern what is authentic and genuinely Christian from what is not?* This takes us back to this passage.
4. What, for you, is the most striking point in this study and why?
*Responses to these questions are discussed in the **Leaders' Handbook**.*