

## MARK 2-3

In these chapters, Jesus continues his ministry of healing. But the narrative slows its pace long enough to focus on some of the interaction between Jesus and other people. Who are these people?

1) Scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees would not necessarily get along with Scribes. Scribes are typically associated with the Sadducees (and the Priesthood) in Jerusalem. Scribes, Sadducees, and Priests are all born into their office and all come from the Levite tribe/clan going all the way back to Aaron, the brother of Moses. They run the temple, ensure that sacrifices to God are offered all year round and that traditional religion is upheld. They are also the leading aristocracy of the Jewish nation which is itself a religious state. The Pharisees, on the other hand, come from all tribes and are considered a lay movement strong on learning, preaching, and teaching the scriptures in 'synagogues' (meaning: assembly or congregation) found wherever Jews live in the world. Pharisees would typically see Sadducees and scribes as more of a sell-out to the Romans in order to maintain their power and status. Sadducees also adhere only to the five books of Moses and nothing more. They don't believe in the resurrection of the dead, spirits, demons, angels and other traditions related to religious laws which they see as newer innovations of the Pharisees.

But the Pharisees and Scribes make common cause against Jesus, seeing him from early on as a threat to their power, control, and influence in Palestine. The Scribes have come down from Jerusalem (where their headquarters at the temple are) to investigate the teaching and practice of Jesus (3:21), and they conclude that his powers of healing are inspired by Satan rather than God. Jesus' claim, as we have seen it shown from chapter 1, is that it is the Holy Spirit in him that is the source of his power. To call God's Spirit Satan is the true blasphemy, and it indicates how blind and destructive of true religion they are. They are condemned outright.

Moreover, the religious leaders take issue with Jesus' apparent disregard for religious law as established in the scriptures, most prominently, adherence to the Sabbath law. By picking corn on the Sabbath, the disciples are, technically, working. Jesus responds by arguing that according to him (and God's will as he represents it) human needs far surpass legal interpretations of the Sabbath, and indeed, true observance of the Sabbath (and scriptural laws generally) have to do with living out the love of God and neighbour. In the case of the disciples, and even more so, the healing of the man in the incident that follows, Jesus is serving the love of neighbour, something for which the religious leaders seem to have little sympathy.

2) People who come for healing and hope. In the case of the first healing in Chapter 2, the loving persistence of 4 friends is seen by Jesus as faith, and on that basis, he heals the man on the spot. If I do not believe that something is possible, I will not persist with it. Their persistence is based on their faith. Moreover, Jesus establishes very clearly that the visible, physical miracle is but an outward manifestation of a powerful spiritual healing and miracle: the forgiveness of sin. In a world where eternity is held in the balance depending on a person's moral condition, the power to forgive sin is much greater than the power merely to heal the body. Clearly, the religious leaders also see this as a greater threat than Jesus' healing powers. Forgiveness of sin is not only something reserved for God alone, but also something that requires religious rituals of cleansing and purification, including temple sacrifice as penance and thanksgiving. By offering forgiveness outside of the established system, Jesus is declaring temple religion subservient to what he offers people. He is replacing the temple in his person. People come to Jesus with all their pain – physical, mental, and spiritual, and receive from him what the temple establishment cannot offer.

3) The disciples / apostles. Jesus calls a fifth disciple (Levi), and this is seen as especially bad given Levi's occupation - a tax collector. Even worse, Jesus eats, drinks and associates with Levi's friends. Again, according to religious custom at the time, Jesus would be rendered unclean by such association, and his moral judgement would be called into question. No wonder he is accused of being an agent of Satan. In Matthew's gospel, Levi is identified as Matthew (Matt. 9:9), and hence, the reason Matthew's gospel is so named. Jesus then establishes a core of 12 disciples from among his followers. The need for 12 would indicate that Jesus is establishing a nucleus to form the new spiritual Israel (representing all 12 tribes). This also indicates that Jesus is very intentional in starting a movement rather than just going it alone.

4) Jesus' family. It is fascinating to note the few accounts in the gospels where members of Jesus' family, primarily his mother, are mentioned. Jesus is at home and the crowds have followed him there. He goes out to minister to them, and whatever he is saying or doing, many doubters question his sanity. Jesus' family goes out of the house in order to bring him inside, but they cannot get to him because of all the people. When Jesus is told that his family wants to see him, he makes a comment that appears dismissive of his family. As the oldest son he would normally have the greatest share of the responsibility for caring for his mother and younger siblings. Since Joseph is not mentioned, he is probably dead at this time and Mary is a widow. But Jesus clearly sees his ministry as extending to the whole family of his people and the world. He cannot treat his immediate family preferentially. The blind, the lame, and the needy are equally his family, and indeed, those who are most open to him are those who alone can receive him for who he really is: the presence and activity of God in the flesh.