

STUDY GUIDE

CHURCH
NAME
THE MIDDLE
LORD OF THE
SABBATH
MARK 2:13-3:6
10/01/2017



NEW VISION

MAIN POINT

Jesus meets us where we are and calls us to salvation and discipleship, but He also establishes the rules of our relationship with Him.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the sickest you have ever been? Did someone help you during that time? Who was it?

How did being that sick change your perspective when you started feeling better?

Why do you think Jesus is sometimes referred to as “The Great Physician?” What does that title indicate about who He is and what He came to do?

Whether we know it or not, all of us are infected with the terminal disease of sin. But that's precisely why Jesus, the Great Physician, came. Because Jesus came for the sick, He is willing to meet anyone right where they are in their spiritual journey and call them to salvation and discipleship. But as we accept that call, we must remember that Jesus establishes the rules of our relationship with Him.

READ AND REFLECT

READ AND REBUILD THE STORY READ MARK 2:23-3:6

HAVE A VOLUNTEER TELL THE STORY (MARK 2:23-3:6) DO AS BEST YOU CAN, DO NOT STOP AND TEACH, TRY NOT TO MAKE POINTS (COMMENTARY), JUST TELL THE STORY.

REBUILD THE STORY AS A GROUP: CHRONOLOGICALLY REBUILD THE STORY FROM MEMORY. ASK QUESTIONS IF NECESSARY. LIKE – “WHAT HAPPENED FIRST?”, “WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?”, “DID WE LEAVE OUT ANYTHING?” FINALLY, HAVE PARTICIPANTS LOOK AT THEIR BIBLES AND SEE IF ANYTHING WAS ADDED OR LEFT OUT OF THE STORY AS THEY GO THROUGH IT ONE MORE TIME

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MARK 2:13-17.

These verses tell us there were crowds following Jesus. Why do you think Jesus focused on Levi in particular?

Why was Levi a surprising choice for Jesus to call? What does Jesus' calling of Levi show us about His character and His mission?

As a tax collector, Levi was considered a greedy traitor in the community. Because he was a social outcast, he would be the last person people would have expected Jesus to associate with. But Jesus, both then and now, calls all kinds of people to be His disciples.

Who are some of the people that we might treat like tax collectors today?

Why is it important that we see ourselves as one of these people instead of being better than these people?

When we do that, what are we showing we believe about God and His grace?

Why is it important to know that Jesus doesn't only call people to salvation, but also to discipleship?

When Jesus extended the call to Levi, He did so with the end in mind. Jesus meets us where we are, and all of us are just as unclean as the people considered Levi to be. At one point or another, all of us were on the outside looking in, and apart from Jesus' call, that's exactly where we would have stayed. When we remember that, we can know that no matter how far and long we walk with Jesus in the journey of discipleship, it is only by His grace. Then we will be able to celebrate the presence of that grace in others.

Why were the Pharisees so upset about the party?

Do you think you have Pharisee-like tendencies in your heart? Why or why not?

Do you have any relationships with people who are far from Jesus? If not, why? What are some ways you might form relationships like that?

Levi was excited about what had happened to him, and so it was the most natural thing in the world to invite his friends from the wrong part of town to meet this same Jesus. As we follow Jesus, we too will begin to adopt His posture toward those who are far from God. We will intentionally seek these people out, just as Levi did, rather than avoid them like the Pharisees did.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MARK 2:18-28.

What, in your own words, is the main point Jesus was making through His actions and teaching in these verses?

How do these verses show us the difference between the way of religion and the way of Jesus?

What are some subtle ways you might be basing your relationship with God on your good works? How do you know if you're doing so?

We face a constant pull, even when we're following Jesus, to focus on our own religious activity. If we're not careful, we can talk ourselves into thinking that we're not really that bad, or that somehow we have earned the favor and love of God because of what we've done. The way of Jesus doesn't fit inside the rules of man-made religion.

These verses also teach us that Jesus, as the Lord, establishes the rules of our relationship with Him. Is there any area of your life in which you are rebelling against the authority of Jesus?

Jesus doesn't offer suggestions to His followers; He makes the rules. If we are going to follow Him, we must recognize His absolute authority in our lives and willingly submit ourselves to it. But unlike human authority, we can know that Jesus commands are always made out of love and are for our own good. That's why we can joyfully submit to His authority as we follow Him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 3:1-6.

The event recounted in these verses happened in the synagogue where Jesus encountered a man with a withered hand. Some Pharisees (v. 6) were present—not to worship God, but to watch Jesus to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath (v. 2). They knew Jesus had the power to perform miracles. Rabbinical law allowed healing on the Sabbath only in the event that life was actually in danger. Jesus knew what the Pharisees believed. Yet He commanded the man to stand up and come center stage so that all in the synagogue could see what He was going to do (v. 3).

What did Jesus “discern” about this situation and the people involved?

How does that compare to what the Pharisees “discerned” about Jesus?

How would you have answered Jesus’ question in verse 4?

What Scripture would you cite to support your answer (see the parallel account of this story in Matthew 12:11-12)?

Jesus saw an opportunity to do good on the Sabbath, while the “good” Pharisees discerned an opportunity to do evil toward Jesus. By posing a question, Jesus tried to teach the heart of God’s truth that observing the Sabbath involved more than a list of don’ts. No one would claim that it was right to do harm or to kill on the Sabbath. The obvious alternative was that surely it must be right to do good and to save a life. Furthermore, to deliberately refuse to do good is to do evil (see Matt. 12:10-12). The Pharisees kept silent, refusing to debate the issue. They could not answer without undermining their own position on Sabbath observance.

Read Mark 3:5 again.

What emotions did Jesus feel toward the people who were watching Him?

Discernment is the ability to perceive God’s truth in any circumstance so that we may live according to it.

What did Jesus discern about this group of religious leaders?

What evidence do you see that the Pharisees lacked discernment about the nature and heart of God?

He was grieved at the Pharisees’ or religious leaders’ hardness of heart. In Hebrew thought, a hard heart meant a stubborn resistance to God’s purpose. Not only was Jesus angry at the insensitivity of the hard-hearted Pharisees toward suffering, but also at their entire system of legalism that elevated the letter of the law over its spirit. In their concern for legal detail, the Pharisees forgot the mercy and grace God demonstrated to people when He made provision for the Sabbath.

Why did Jesus decide to heal rather than observe the Sabbath according to the teachings of the Pharisees?

What do we learn about Jesus and His mission through this scene?

Why did the Pharisees want to kill Jesus?

To what lengths were they willing to go?

This brief exchange shows us an incredible picture of the gospel. The religious leaders were so focused on themselves and their rules that they failed to see the hurting man in front of them. But Jesus didn't turn the man away. Instead, He set the man free. By pointing out the religious leaders' selfishness and misplaced focus on tradition, Jesus reminds us of His compassion for us and the compassion we should have for others. The Pharisees however, were more concerned about protecting their own power. Jesus was a threat to their religious rule and since they could not discredit Him, they made plans to kill Him instead.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Who is one person in your life in need of God's mercy? How can you further your relationship with him or her this week?

What are some practical ways you can associate with the kind of "sinners" that Jesus came to save?

From the two stories in Mark 3, what can we conclude are some of the benefits of God's gift of discernment for our relationship with God and our personal ministry?

Why is it important that disciples of Christ be discerning?

In what ways might we unintentionally hurt the mission of Christ if we do not practice discernment?

PRAY

As you close your group time, thank Jesus that He has called you even when you were lost. Ask Him to help you remember that we all have been infected with the disease of sin and all are in great need. Ask Him to help you engage people that might be considered "off-limits" with the message of grace.

COMMENTARY

MARK 2:13-27

2:13–14. The tax office is literally a toll gate, probably on the road between Damascus and the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus saw Levi and commanded him to follow me. Levi immediately got up and followed Jesus. In following Jesus, Levi (Matthew) left behind a very profitable business. Tax collectors were some of the most hated people in Israel. In order to be a tax collector, a person had to purchase the rights for this business from Rome. Since Levi was in Galilee, he would have been an agent of Herod. He could then charge whatever tax he wanted in order to recoup the money he paid to Rome for his privilege license. Tax collectors

were considered traitors and extortioners. They were not allowed to be witnesses or judges in court because they were considered untrustworthy. They were excommunicated from the synagogue. And yet Jesus came to Matthew and invited him into fellowship.

2:15. Most scholars assume that the house they came to was Levi's house. Many believe this was a meal given by Levi for his business associates and friends to introduce them to Jesus. It is plain from the text that once again a large crowd gathered and Jesus offended the religious establishment.

2:16. When we think of Jesus eating a meal with sinners, we generally think of these people as perhaps other tax collectors, prostitutes, people of questionable moral character. For the Pharisees, however, sinners were anyone who did not follow their interpretation of Scripture. For instance, the Pharisees had rigid laws of cleanliness and washing. Anyone, therefore, who did not wash his or her hands before a meal was a sinner. We can imagine their shock when Jesus went to dinner with a friend of Rome.

2:17. Jesus was not saying here that the scribes were not sick. He stated that a person needs to realize his own sickness and sin first. Doctors' offices are not generally crammed with healthy people clamoring to see the doctor. It is only when they realize their sickness that they turn to the doctor. So it is with the sin-sick soul and the Lord Jesus. It is ironic that Jesus seemed to point back to the miracle at the beginning of chapter 2. The man admitted his need, as did his friends, for they desperately wanted their friend healed. Only the scribes admitted no need and therefore received no healing.

2:18–19. Fasting was another of the Pharisees' interpretations of the law that the common people ("sinners") did not follow. Jewish tradition demanded a fast once a year: on the day of Atonement. For the stricter Jews, however, fasting was practiced much more frequently. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. These were generally twelve-hour fasts, from sunup to sundown. The Pharisees also made sure that people knew how spiritual they were by showing everyone they were fasting (Matt. 6:16–18).

Some people asked Jesus why Jesus' disciples did not fast. We do not know if this was an honest question or an implied accusation of unrighteousness. In reply, Jesus used an analogy common to the time—the bridal party. Since engagements were often long (in some cases years), the actual wedding was a time of feasting and great joy. The wedding celebration also symbolized the age of salvation. This verse also serves as a messianic reference with Christ as the bridegroom.

2:20–22. This is the first indication in Mark that Jesus was fully aware of his mission. Jesus' prediction here introduces a somber note that has been missing up to now in Mark's account of miracles and controversies. It reminds us that joy and suffering are often two different sides of the same coin. Again, Jesus used analogies that the Jews of that day would have been familiar with. In sewing, if a piece of unshrunk cloth was used to patch an old garment, the patch would shrink when it was washed, making a worse tear of the cloth. New wine needs to be put in flexible skins so the skin has room to expand as it ferments. If it is put into an old, brittle skin, it will burst the skin. Jesus was making the point that the new order and the old order (symbolized either by the Pharisees or John the Baptist) are incompatible. Jesus' claim is that something new is happening. Verse 18 brought up John the Baptist and his disciples, who taught the need for repentance because the kingdom of God was at hand.

Jesus claimed that something new was happening, something incompatible with even John the Baptist. It was a message of salvation; and this echoed Jesus' proclamation of his mission in Luke 4:18–19. In these verses, Jesus did not finish the Isaiah quote, but stopped it here: "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Something new was happening—and old, brittle wineskins would not be able to contain it.

It is interesting to note that in each case something is destroyed. God does not just mend our hearts; he gives us brand new ones. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). He gives us a new nature, and we are new creatures in Christ. To try to put this kind of life into old, legalistic systems is to destroy the new life.

This teaching anticipates Paul's teaching that Christianity is not an extension of Judaism. Judaism cannot contain it. Jewish laws are not binding upon Christians. Paul took up this topic with enthusiasm in Galatians. The old order regulated behavior with rules; the new order regulates by relationship. Jesus did not come to reform Judaism, as the prophets before him had. He came to introduce a new entity, the church.

2:23–24. In a continuation of the preceding confrontation with the Pharisees, Mark introduces a controversy that was at the heart of Judaism—the Sabbath. On this particular Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were picking off the heads of grain and rubbing them between their hands to get rid of the chaff to eat the grain. The Pharisees interpreted this as reaping, winnowing, threshing, and preparing a meal; thus, the disciples were classified as law breakers. The acts of picking and eating the grain were not unlawful in themselves. Fields were harvested in such a way that the corners were not harvested. These corners with standing stalks of grain could be eaten by anyone as long as they did not put a sickle to the grain (Deut. 23:25).

2:25–26. In response, Jesus referred to King David's actions in 1 Samuel 21:1–6. The Pharisees and scribes would have been familiar with this passage. But they did not understand its significance. Matthew picks up this same story in Matthew 12:7 and adds a comment by Jesus: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (compare Luke 11:42). Jesus cut through the posturing and pretense of the Pharisees and exposed their hearts.

2:27–28. Eventually, as Jesus noted (Luke 11:46), the number of rules became a heavy burden. Instead of freeing a day for humanity to rest from its labors, the Pharisees made the Sabbath into a day of burdensome rule-keeping. With Jesus' final statement in this chapter, he declared his lordship over the law. His Sabbath controversies, however, did not end.

MARK 3:1-6

The account does not emphasize the healing but the question of Sabbath observance. Therefore, it ought to be classified as a conflict and/or pronouncement story, although the pronouncement is cast as a question (v. 4). To understand the Pharisaic position, one must realize that Sabbath observance was one of the more important elements in Judaism and one noticeable distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Mark both gave further insight into Jesus' "liberal" attitude toward the Sabbath and showed how this attitude was a major factor in Pharisaic opposition that culminated in Jesus' death (v. 6). Likely, Mark intended Jesus' freedom in observing the Sabbath to justify Christian freedom with reference to that day. Some think the vividness and detail of the account indicates eyewitness testimony, probably that of Peter. This could be, but it is beyond proof.

3:1. Jesus and His disciples regularly worshiped in synagogues, as did Paul later. Inasmuch as this is not really a healing story, the affliction is not described in detail. It probably was some kind of paralysis.

3:2. The "some of them" are identified in v. 6 as the Pharisees. The imperfect tense (*paretroun*) is probably iterative: "they kept on watching" or "kept on lying in wait for." Apparently they were more concerned to accuse Jesus than to worship. The scribal rule the Pharisees followed permitted healing on the Sabbath only where life was in danger, which certainly was not the present case.

3:3. The NIV's "stand up front" is a modernization. The Greek says "get up in the middle" because, in second- and third-century synagogues at least, the seats were stone benches around the walls.

3:4 By His question, Jesus lifted the issue of Sabbath observance above a list of prohibitions to the higher general principle. No one would claim that it was "lawful" or right to do evil or kill on the Sabbath. The obvious alternative is that it must be right to do good and save life. To heal is to do good; to do nothing is to do evil. To heal is to "save" a life; not to heal is the equivalent of killing. For Mark, merely not doing work and resting on the Sabbath or the Lord's Day was not enough. The day must be used for all kinds of good things. The Pharisees were silent because whatever answer they gave to Jesus' question would have undermined their position on Sabbath observance.

3:5. Here is a certain reference to the anger of Jesus. In their parallel accounts, Matthew and Luke preferred not to attribute to Jesus an emotion that among humans is often sinful. Jesus' anger was not sinful, however, because it was directed toward evil and because it was controlled. Perhaps "with righteous indignation" would avoid the offense. "At their stubborn hearts" could be translated more literally "at their hardness of heart," but the word "hardness" often takes on the additional idea of willful "blindness." The NEB and REB have a striking rendition here: "Looking round at them with anger and sorrow at their obstinate stupidity." Jesus was angry not only at insensitivity toward suffering, but at the entire system of legalism where the letter is more important than the spirit.

3:6. In all of ancient literature, the Herodians are referred to only here and in 12:13 (cf. Matt 22:16). One can only surmise that they supported Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (see the comments on 6:14–29). They may have further advocated restoration of Herodian rule of Judea, which was a Roman imperial province governed by a legate, or (as such officials were later called) procurator, during the ministry of Jesus. Ordinarily the Pharisees would have had nothing to do with the Herodians, but common enemies often make strange bedfellows. Perhaps the Herodians opposed Jesus because of His relationship to John the Baptist, who condemned Herod's divorce and remarriage (6:18).

The first explicit reference to Jesus' death is in v. 6. The verse concludes not only the present pericope, but all five conflict stories. The Pharisees' plot to "kill" (apolesosin, which literally means "destroy" as one would do to an animal) one who not only saved a life, but who came to give life to all, exemplifies Markan irony.