

# The Gospel of Mark

## Compassion and Truth – The Call of a Servant

### Mark 1:1-13

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



This next larger section of Mark (2:1-3:6) features a series of five controversies. The same pattern is present in each one: (1) Jesus does something surprising, (2) the scribes challenge it, and (3) Jesus responds in a way that silences the scribes. These conflicts build to a climax in which Jesus turns the tables on them. In the final conflict, Jesus confronts them with a direct question and becomes angry because they refuse to answer. They respond with a plot to murder him.<sup>1</sup> The portion we are looking at this week (2:1-17) will give us a front-row seat to two remarkable acts of faith and obedience. First, we meet four friends who do everything they can to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Why? Because there is something distinctively different about Jesus, and they are convinced that if they can just get to him, everything can be different. And they are right! Then, we meet Levi, who will become part of Jesus' inner circle, be known to us as Matthew, and go on to write his own Gospel account. Levi is a tax collector. That is, he is a Jewish man living in a highly Jewish area and working for the Roman government. To say that he is unpopular is a gross understatement. Levi is seen as a traitor and a cheat. Yet, here is Jesus, and he invites Levi to follow him, and he does! Then, Jesus goes to his house for a BBQ with Levi's outcast friends, and the religious leaders get all worked up over it.

There is so much for us to pay attention to with the characters and the setting of the scenes. It is all so rich. But why does Mark give us a front-row seat to these events? Simply, he wants us to examine the nature and character of Jesus. He is convinced that when we take a good look at Jesus, we, like him and many in these scenes, will see something distinctively different about Jesus. He is different from how we would intuitively react or respond. He is different than how their culture and our culture tell us to understand things. Jesus is, as John (Jn. 1:14) tells us and Mark shows us, the embodiment of truth and grace or truth and compassion perfectly together. He is the servant messiah, and in his example, we clearly see that **servants regularly offer timely help and timeless truth.**

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 41.

# 1. Something is distinctively different about Jesus.

- a. **Context** – We are at least 18-20 months into Jesus’ earthly ministry to this point. When we read Mark’s Gospel, we can miss the actual timeline of these events.
  - i. What has happened in the life & ministry of Jesus up to this point?
    - 1. Baptism: Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23
    - 2. Temptation: Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13
    - 3. Introduction to the first Disciples: John 1:35-51
      - a. Peter, Andrew, Phillip, & Nathaniel are all present.
        - i. 1:40 – Andrew to Peter → “We have found the messiah.”
    - 4. Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11
      - a. First public miracle. → Mom made him do it! LOL!
    - 5. First cleansing of the Temple: John 2:13-22
    - 6. Conversation w/ Nicodemus: John 3:1-21
      - a. Pharisees reaching out to Jesus in the “cover of night”.
    - 7. The Samaritan woman: John 4:5-26
      - a. All of this happens between Mark 1:13 & 1:14.
    - 8. Declaration of Messiahship in Nazareth: Luke 4:16-31
    - 9. Move to Capernaum: Matt. 4:13-16
      - a. Prophetic fulfillment! (Isa. 9:1-2)
- b. **Again, just like in chapter 1, Mark invites us to examine, who is Jesus?**
  - i. **Powerful** – Heals and knows the inner thoughts.
  - ii. **Son of Man** – Divine and forgives sins.
    - 1. The title “Son of Man” is pregnant with Messianic implications. Jesus is not “beating around the bush” or being coy, he is being clear about his character and nature. He is boldly declaring that he is the Messiah and that he is divine.
    - 2. According to the Gospels, “Son of Man” is Jesus’ favorite self-designation. **It is used eighty-six times in the NT (Synoptics 69x, John 13x, elsewhere 4x).**<sup>2</sup>
  - iii. **Gracious and Truthful** – “Only the sick need a doctor.”
    - 1. The irony is thick at this point. The scribes are both right and wrong at the same time. Here is their logic:
      - a. We know God alone can forgive sins.
      - b. Jesus claims to forgive sins.
      - c. Therefore, Jesus is making himself out to be God.
      - d. This is blasphemy.<sup>3</sup>
- c. **Something is different about Jesus → The crowds know it. → Four friends know it. → Levi knows it.**
  - i. They are moved to remarkable action and obedience because of it.
    - 1. **The crowds press in to hear Jesus teach.** → He teaches with authority that had never heard before. (cf. 1:22)
      - a. But this time the crowds came, not merely to be healed of bodily illnesses or afflictions, but to hear the word of God (verse 2). The temporary

<sup>2</sup> D. L. Bock, “Son of Man,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 894.

<sup>3</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 43.

withdrawal by Jesus in 1:38, and the Galilean preaching tour of 1:39, had served their purpose; the wheat had been separated from the chaff, among the hearers of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

**2. The friends “un-roof” the house to get their friend to Jesus.**

- a. The house was Jesus’ primary residence in the area and likely belonged to Simon Peter’s mother-in-law.<sup>5</sup>
- b. **A typical house in 1st-century Israel had a flat roof constructed of timbers laid parallel to each other.** Sticks were laid crosswise over the timbers. Then reeds, branches, and thistles were laid upon that layer. Finally, the whole thing was overlaid with about a foot of dirt, which was packed down to resist water.<sup>6</sup>
- c. The roof was used for working and sometimes for sleeping, and so it was not flimsy in construction; wooden beams or branches were thatched with rush and daubed with mud.<sup>2</sup>

**3. Levi follows Jesus and invites his friends.**

- a. **As a spontaneous expression of his joy Levi gave a banquet for Jesus and his disciples to which he invited his fellow tax officers and a group of men who are designated “sinners.”**<sup>7</sup>
- b. Again, just like with the calling of the first disciples, we can read Mark’s account and think that this moment on the road along the Sea of Galilee as the first moment Levi had heard of or interacted with Jesus. This simply is not true. Jesus has been preaching and teaching, healing, and ministering in this region for 12-18 months now. Levi has certainly heard about Jesus and it is very likely that he has heard him teach. His response is remarkable, but it is not “out of the blue.”
- c. His response to follow Jesus and to invite friends to meet Jesus is one of trust. Levi trusted in what he knew of Jesus’ character and nature.

**d. Two questions for us to consider as we look at Jesus:**

**i. What about Jesus’ example encourages me?**

- 1. That is, what comforts me because of who Jesus is?

**ii. What about Jesus’ example challenges me?**

- 1. That is, what confronts or disrupts the way I see myself or the world around me?

**iii. I.e., If the Word of God is both a lens and mirror what I am seeing clearly?**

- 1. Lens – To see God clearly.
- 2. Mirror – To see myself clearly.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Alan Cole, [\*Mark: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 120.

<sup>5</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 41.

<sup>7</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 103.

## 2. Physical Needs – Timely Help

### a. Compassion and Truth lenses – Which is primary for you?

- i. Each of us has a capacity for truth and compassion. However, we each have our own unique bend towards those. It can be helpful to think of them as separate lenses that we look through. For all of us, one lens will be the primary lens, and with that, it will be the lens in which tend to see or interpret the events and interactions of our days.
  1. Think to yourself about your interactions – Work, home (spouse & kids), general interactions through the day, etc. Do you react with a truth lens or a compassion lens? **That is, do you feel for those around you or do you see facts?**
  2. **One of the distinctively different things about Jesus is that he sees through both lenses equally at all times. He is completely capable of compassion and truth perfectly. (cf. Jn 1:14)**
- ii. **Servants always start with compassion** → Compassion sees others as more important than myself.
  1. Yes, Jesus operates with both lenses equally at all times, but you and I do not. So, when we look at the example of Jesus, we are challenged to begin with compassion.

### b. Servants start with compassion - Why is that? → To serve is to make someone else more important than yourself.

#### i. Compassion is: To have sympathetic pity for someone.

1. **Compassion – Head (understand what they feel)**
2. **Empathy – Heart (feel what they feel)**
3. **Marcy – Hands (move to action)**
- ii. <sup>35</sup> And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Mt. 9:35-38)

### c. It is hard to be a servant to someone, when we aren’t willing to feel what they feel.

- i. **Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. - Phil. 2:6**
- ii. <sup>14</sup> **Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. - Heb. 4:14-16**

### d. Compassion is not the absence of truth.

- i. Too often we compartmentalize compassion / grace & truth.
  1. In the Kingdom of God, they are one and the same.
    - a. Ie. You can’t have one without the other.
    - b.

### e. How do you need to grow and be stretched in this area?

- i. Compare and contrast compassion (of Jesus) and Vindication ( of the religious leaders).
  - 1. What are the markers compassion?
    - a. Listen More
    - b. Prefer Patience
    - c. Give Grace
  - 2. What are the markers of vindication?
    - a. Talk More
    - b. Demanding Tone
    - c. Be Outraged
- f. **What does it mean to be like Jesus in this area?**
  - i. I.e., The Jesus way means that compassion is not the absence of truth.
  - ii. Compassion lived out:
    - 1. Listen more... talk less. 80/20 rule.
      - a. That is listen 80% of the time and talk 20%.
    - 2. Patience over perfection.
      - a. Patience seeks to understand while perfection only wants results. Patience sees growth while perfection only sees mistakes.
    - 3. Grace instead of outrage.
      - a. Grace is getting something that you don't deserve. Often, slowing down and not overreacting (outrage) especially when someone is clearly in the wrong is a gift of grace. Particularly in

### 3. Spiritual Needs – Timeless Truth

- a. **Compassion and Truth lenses – Which is primary for you?**
  - i. Again, we have to come back to this question. Why? Because the way of Jesus requires that we take both truth and compassion seriously. In that, we treat them both as equals and both as kingdom values that are not to be compromised or one valued over the other.
    - 1. This is a clarifier for our cultural moment. We have one group on the conservative side that tends to claim truth as their penultimate value. On the other side, progressives tend to claim compassion as their penultimate value.
    - 2. **Jesus calls us away from both sides and says that if we are to be like him, if we are to be servants we must operate with both. → That is, we need timely help and timeless truth.**
      - a. **There is much for us to chew on and consider right now as we are entering an election cycle.**
      - b. **This call of Jesus could serve us well as a community of believers to model a different way in this season of hyperbole and exaggerated rhetoric.**
- b. **Transformation vs Transaction – If the heart isn't changed, the behavior is just a band-aid.**
  - i. What does it mean to follow Jesus in a life-defining way? (Four friends & Levi)
    - 1. Mark doesn't let us off the hook in these accounts. It isn't just what Jesus could do, it was the truth of his character and nature that drew people in.
  - ii. Not just a prophetic healer... "Preaching the word to them..." **v.3**

1. **Jesus is addressing not just the physical needs... but the deepest one... spiritual need. → Jesus has made his messianic claims clear in the miracles he has performed for far.**
  2. The crowds that milled about the door of the house, whether it was Mary's home or the house of Simon's mother-in-law, or the house of some other unknown friend of Jesus, were hungry to hear the word of God; and so the poor had the gospel preached to them (Matt. 11:5), **the last great messianic sign.**<sup>8</sup>
  3. But what could have been a straightforward account of Jesus' power over physical illness is given a new dimension by his **(apparently unsought)** declaration of the forgiveness of sins, leading to the scribes' theological objection to his assumption of the divine prerogative.<sup>9</sup>
- iii. The power of the gospel is the power to change the lives of people.**
1. Again, let's go back to Jesus' statements – I can forgive sin and the sick need a doctor.
  2. "I can forgive sins." – **They (scribes) saw at once down to the theological roots of the matter. Of course, none but God could forgive sin;** how dare a mere human like Jesus claim such authority? Again and again during the life of Jesus the same dilemma was to reappear.<sup>10</sup>
    - a. **Jesus is speaking compassionate truth to the Scribes. (v.8-9)**
      - i. They came hard-hearted.
      - ii. They came knowing who the Messiah was supposed to be.
      - iii. They came with skeptical curiosity. (cf. 12:34)
  3. **"The sick need a doctor" → Everyone (except Jesus) there was sick!**
    - a. The Pharisees and their scribes were the spiritual descendants of the *Hasidim* who had distinguished themselves by zeal for observance of the Law in spite of the repressive measures of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. They were deeply devoted to the Law and strictly governed their own life by the interpretation passed down in the scribal tradition. They criticized Jesus because he failed to observe the distinction between "the righteous" and "the sinners" which was an essential component of their piety.<sup>11</sup>
      - i. It can be so easy for us to pull the rug out from under that Pharisees and religious leaders here. We must understand that they understood that love for God was shown in obedience to God's law. To not obey the law was tantamount to blatant rejection of God.
    - b. **Jesus silenced their protest with a traditional proverb:** "the healthy have no need of a physician, but rather the sick." With this maxim, which the Pharisees recognized as valid, Jesus implied that it was his responsibility to sit at table fellowship with excisemen and the despised common

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<sup>9</sup> R. T. France, [\*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 121.

<sup>10</sup> R. Alan Cole, [\*Mark: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 121.

<sup>11</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 104.

people. He is willing to adopt the scribal distinction between the righteous and sinners, but limits his own activity to the outcasts.<sup>12</sup>

- c. How do you need to grow and be stretched in this area? → What does it mean to be like Jesus in this area?
  - i. A servant-follower of Jesus, starts with compassion so that life-changing truth can be digested.
    - 1. Truth without compassion is legalism / moralism.
    - 2. Compassion without truth is uncompassionate.
  - ii. The reality is that Jesus meets us with compassion and transforms us with truth. If we think that we can help one another or our family or our neighbors with anything less, we are gravely mistaken.

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<sup>12</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 104.