

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL - CHAPTER THREE

Jesus had become a celebrity to the point where it was hard for those in real need to reach Him. Four good friends were determined to give the paralysed man an opportunity to meet Jesus, even to the extent of demolishing His family's roof. Faith focuses on Him, not the obstacles, in seeking to help the helpless. The love of God sees only a searching heart, not a damaged roof. Jesus surprised everyone watching by forgiving the paralytic man's sins before healing his legs. Paralysis in a physical sense in the New Testament pictures our spiritual paralysis which makes us unable to walk or live the way God wants. We need to be forgiven at the cross before we can trust Christ to empower us to live differently. The religious people objected because they realised that in forgiving the man Jesus was speaking on behalf of God. The ordinary people simply recognised that God was at work and praised Him for it.(2:1-12)

Jesus' priority was still to teach people. The opportunities were vast. The key would be to find those who could share the task with Him. Levi, also known as Matthew, was the most unlikely candidate for discipleship. He was presumably a Levite who was meant to be bringing his people to God but instead he had a job as a tax collector for the Roman conquerors. He would be regarded as a traitor and was likely to be a bully and a cheat. Yet Jesus who saw his heart rather than his reputation walked up to his tax booth and invited him to become one of His followers. Levi immediately revealed the change in his heart by inviting Jesus and His friends to meet his own friends at his home over dinner. It was a marvellous opportunity to share the gospel with a group of social outcasts and Jesus would have loved it. The religious people disagreed again and grumbled to Jesus' disciples about the unsuitable company He kept. The Lord asked them a simple question. Who is the doctor there for, the sick or the healthy?(2:13-17)

For the next interruption to the dinner party, the Pharisees joined forces with John the Baptist's former disciples. All of them saw following God as about giving things up, on this occasion food in a religious fast. Why did Jesus not teach the same approach to godliness as they did? He gave them three quick illustrations. Firstly a wedding is a time for celebration not mourning as in a funeral. The Bridegroom had come from heaven for His bride, the church.(Rev.19:7-9) Secondly God's plan for us is a totally new life, not the old one patched up. Thirdly like new wine in a new wineskin, knowing Christ means that a new life inside produces a new life outside. They went away with a lot to think about.(2:18-22)

The religious people were now on the lookout for the slightest slip from their expectations by Jesus or His disciples. An opportunity was presented soon afterwards when they caught the disciples walking through grain-fields rubbing ears of wheat together to separate the grain, and then eating it. This was permitted in the Old Testament as a way of making sure that the poor did not go hungry.(Deut.23:25) The Pharisees had managed to restrict this practice, probably because they owned some of the fields, by banning it on the Sabbath on the grounds that it was work. Their religion denied food to the needy on what was supposed to be God's special day.(Exod.20:9-11) Jesus reminded them of the story of David on the run from King Saul asking the priest to give the sacred bread from the tabernacle to his hungry men.(1 Sam.21:1-6) God intended the bread to be eaten by the needy just as He wanted the Sabbath to be a day when we had time to put others first. As the Son of Man, He not only would decide how His day should be used.(2:23-28)

Have another look at your titles for the sections of chapter two. Can you add to them or improve them in the light of the closer study you did of that chapter? Now read chapter three and choose a theme or title for each part. I suggest the following divisions:- verses 1-6; 7-12; 13-19; 20-21; 22-30; 31-35. Do not take long over your choice. This is based on your first impression rather than detailed study at this stage. Your first thought will probably be your best for the moment.

Again we will take each section in turn more slowly.

3:1-6 Q.1 If leprosy pictures sin, and paralysed legs our inability to walk or live as God wants, what problem could having a withered hand illustrate? What then would Jesus healing of this man represent? Why does Jesus first ask the man to rise, come forward and stretch out his hand? What does it tell us about the real meaning of faith in Jesus on our part?

Q.2 If the religious people do not agree with Jesus' action, why do they not answer the question in verse four? What does this show about their hearts? How can similar attitudes still occur today in us or others? Give practical examples. According to verse 5 is there a place for anger? What is it? What are the dangers of anger? Look up Eph.4:25-27. What are the dangers of not being angry? How could Jesus be angry and grieved at the same time?

Q.3 Why do the Pharisees and Herodians now want to kill Jesus? The Pharisees were so spiritual that they would normally have nothing to do with the Roman Government. The Herodians on the other hand saw co-operation

with the Romans, and therefore political power, as the answer to their people's problems. What do these two groups now have in common? How does this story connect to and follow on from those in chapter two?

3:7-12 Q.4 Looking at a map of Israel in the time of Jesus what do verses seven and eight tell us about who was attracted to Jesus? What draws them? How today will people "hear of all that He is doing and come to Him"? Why does Jesus seek the use of His disciples' boat? Is He trying to get away from people?(Lk.5:3) Could it be that for the moment they are reaching out to Him for the wrong reason?

Q.5 What does verse 11 tell us about Jesus' power over the Devil and his agents? Look up I Jn.4:4 How does this help when we feel that we are being attacked by Satan? Why does Jesus not want the demons to advertise for Him? Is not all promotion helpful in the Christian Church?

3:13-19 Q.6 From a vast crowd by the sea Jesus goes up a mountain with a handful of followers. Why does He bother with just twelve men, when there are thousands seeking Him? On what basis does Jesus select the twelve? For what three purposes does He appoint them? How are those purposes linked together? Peter means 'a stone'. Christ is pictured in the Bible as 'a rock'.(I Cor.10:4) Why do you suppose Jesus changes Simon's name? Judging by their nick-names 'Sons of Thunder' what changes does Jesus plan to make in James and John?

Q.7 Looking at the rest of the twelve, what glimpses into their characters and backgrounds do the rest of the gospels give us?(Jn.1:40; 6:8; 14:8; Matt.9:9; Jn.20:24) The Zealots were ultranationalist guerrillas, committed to the violent overthrow of Rome(Jn.12:6; 13:2,27; 18:2; Matt.27:3-5; Acts 1:16-18.) Why does Jesus not choose 'better' men? Why does He choose us?

3:20-21 Q.8 Thousands come to Him, twelve follow Him, but two groups reject Him. Who are they? Why do you think they do it? Which group's rejection would have hurt Him the most? How do we also face rejection today?

3:22-30 Q.9 Beelzebub means 'Lord of the dung heap'. It was the name of a pagan god in the Old Testament associated in the minds of people in those days with Satan. Why do the scribes accuse Jesus of being possessed by the Devil? How could they possibly be so mixed up as ever to consider such an idea? How do religious people today still manage to have an 'upside down' view of the Christian gospel? How does Jesus answer the scribes? What is the simple logic of His reply? How does verse 27 help to answer the question of whether Christians can be demon-possessed?

Q.10 'Blaspheme' means 'speak against'. Notice that verses 28 and 29 were only used to Jesus' religious opponents. They were never used to believers or to the drop-outs of society. What does 'blaspheme against the Holy Spirit' mean? How did it particularly apply to these people? Why is it the only sin that will never be forgiven? What can we say to people who are fearful that they may have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit?

3:31-35 Q.11 In the light of verse 21 why are Jesus' mother and brothers calling for Him in verse 31? How does He deal with a difficult situation? What can we learn from His answers about how to handle family pressure on us, particularly when the family does not yet share our faith in Christ? Is He rude to them? What greater idea than our natural family is Jesus promising in verses 34 and 35? Who belongs to this greater family? What are the benefits and responsibilities of this new family? How does belonging to Jesus' family help us to cope with pressure from our natural family? What was the result of Jesus' way of dealing with His human family? (Acts1:14)