

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

In contrast to the other gospels, Mark's account of the life of Jesus leaps straight into action with a brief description of the importance and ministry of John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for the entrance of Jesus into history and our lives. Malachi(3:1) and Isaiah(40:3) had both promised His coming so the Jews were ready for a herald who would precede their Messiah, (Christ in Greek).

His message was simple – repentance, a change of heart, demonstrated outwardly by the symbol of baptism, which would be the condition for God's forgiveness. John did not dress or live like a successful CEO because he saw himself just as a humble servant. He promised that those who responded by repentance would eventually receive the Holy Spirit when the One he promised had come and done His work.(1:1-8)

Jesus finally arrived and received baptism from John, not because He had sin needing forgiveness but to picture His willingness to die for us and to rise again to live in us.(Lk.12:50) The Holy Spirit descended on Him, like the dove who brought good news of resurrection life to Noah,(Gen.8:8-12) and the Father acknowledged from heaven His approval of the Son in words which must have encouraged Him throughout life when no-one else at times was pleased with Him.(1:9-11)

His work began at once with two spiritual forces clashing. The Spirit impelled, the Devil tempted and the angels ministered. Heaven as always won. The arrest of John seemed like a defeat for God but heaven counter-attacked as Jesus began to use His only weapon, His word. His message was simple. God wants to be the King in us right now. Repentance and faith are the two sides of the same coin which describes the attitude which lets Him.(1:12-15)

Immediately Jesus began the process of appointing His government. His first four appointees were fishermen, not academics. Two at least had already heard and met Him through John's ministry.(Jn.1:40-42) As they had once searched for fish now they would hunt for men to follow Jesus. To be effective followers they had to leave their previous means of security and dependence on family to become part of His family, as we must do.(1:16-20)

The first challenge facing Jesus' government was who was now in charge? Jesus demonstrated His authority by teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the place and time in which people should have been listening to God's word. It was immediately clear to His audience that He had authority, not because of His title, appearance, long words or loud voice, but because God was speaking through Him. The Satanic opposition resisted at once through a demon-possessed man but Jesus silenced and removed the spirit, so it was clear who was now the King.(1:21-28)

Simon Peter's mother-in-law, whose existence gives clear proof that Peter was married, was sick. Jesus demonstrated His authority over disease by healing her. She was immediately able to serve Him, showing that she had become part of His kingdom.(1:29-31)

Jesus, having demonstrated His authority over demons and disease, was instantly in overwhelming demand. He did the right thing by withdrawing to spend time with His Father whose instructions were clear. Preaching the gospel was His priority but at the same time He defeated Satan wherever he opposed Him.(1:32-39)

When confronted by sickness, Jesus continued to show His sovereignty, by dealing with it. At the same time He was also using various diseases to teach the meaning of His message. Leprosy in the Bible is a powerful picture of sin, starting small and gradually taking over, damaging sensation of the world around and leading to horrible deformity, ugliness and loneliness. Jesus did the unthinkable and touched the leper who believed He could cleanse him, as He reaches out through the cross to a dirty world. The Lord did not want the leper talking about the miracle until he had fulfilled the Old Testament instruction to lepers,(Lev.14:1-32) because He wanted the healing of a leper to be an illustration of truth not the gospel message in itself.(1:40-45)

Review the titles you gave each section in chapter one and see whether you would like to change or add to those titles after more detailed study. Now read chapter two and again choose a title or theme for each section. My suggestions are as follows:- verses 1-12; 13,14; 15-17; 18-22; 23-28. Let us take a closer look at each section.

2:1-12 Q.1 A paralytic, presumably a man paralysed from the waist down, would have no power to do many things for himself. The Bible often reminds us that we have no power of ourselves to change the way we are and behave. What examples of how we are 'paralysed' to be able to change our behaviour can you think of?

Q.2 How did the paralytic get to Jesus? How can good friends help us (or we help them) when we are aware we have failed to live as we should? What did Jesus recognise was the secret of the friends who helped? What did Jesus do for the paralytic before He made him able to walk again? What does Jesus have to do for us before He can change our behaviour? How did the religious people, the scribes, see Jesus' actions? What had they failed to understand about Him?

Q.3 How did the ordinary people respond to what He said and did? Where did they think Jesus' authority came from? If being paralysed in our legs is like being paralysed in our ability to change the way we live, what is pictured by Jesus telling the man to rise, take up his pallet,(bed) and go home? Where should Jesus Christ living in us show first?

2:13,14 Q.4 Ordinary people loved to listen to what Jesus was teaching. Why do you suppose that was? Do they still today? With so many people prepared to listen to His messages, why was it that Jesus still had time for one man who was not even there for His teaching? Why did Jesus pick on Levi, (who was also known as Matthew) who became one of His apostles?

2:15-17 Q.5 Levi took Jesus home to his place and invited all his friends to meet the Lord. How does this show that if the heart changes, the home changes? Who objected to Jesus eating with Levi's friends? Why did they object? How do religious people still object to Christians mixing with those who do not know the Lord? What does Jesus' answer mean? Is He saying that the Pharisees are not sinners and therefore do not need to be forgiven? How should we as Christians see our involvement in the home or elsewhere with those who are not Christians? Are there dangers for us in being in non-Christian company? How are we to sort out whether we should be in any particular company at any time?

2:18-22 Q.6 What are the religious people objecting to this time? What would be similar examples of their objections these days? What three illustrations does Jesus give to answer their objection? What is the point of each one? How do all three pictures say something about what the Christian life really is? How would you reply to someone who said that Christians are people who give up things like smoking, drinking and so on?

2:23-28 Q.7 Among the many Old Testament instructions about the care of the poor was a law telling people always to leave some grain at the corners of their fields when they reaped, so that needy people could help themselves.(Lev.19:9,10) What does this story tell us about the financial situation of Jesus and His disciples? Look up the command God gave about the Sabbath day in Exod.20:8-11. Do you think God meant that poor, hungry people could not gather a few handfuls of grain to eat on the Sabbath? Why do you suppose the Pharisees had made such a law?

Q.8 Look up the story Jesus used to answer them from I Samuel 21. We are not told that this happened on a Sabbath. How then did David's action, of which the priest approved, provide an answer to the Pharisees objections? How do we make the same mistake they made today by inventing new laws which keep the needs of the poor unmet?