

# **JESUS in the Judean Outback?**

**Mark 1:1-13**

## **☞ What would you like to praise God for today?**

### John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 Here begins the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

2 In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God said,

"Look, I am sending my messenger before you,  
and he will prepare your way.

3 He is a voice shouting in the wilderness:

'Prepare a pathway for the Lord's coming!

Make a straight road for him!' "

4 This messenger was John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness and was preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. 5 People from Jerusalem and from all over Judea traveled out into the wilderness to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. 6 His clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey. 7 He announced: "Someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am--so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

### The Baptism of Jesus

9 One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. 10 And when Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."

### The Temptation of Jesus

12 Immediately the Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness. 13 He was there for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Mark 1:1-13 (NLT)

## **☞ Pray for God's guidance**

1. What is the strangest thing you have ever eaten?
2. What do the contexts of the quotes (Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1) teach about the "coming one"? (vv.2-3)
3. Why is John's ministry so popular? So important? (vv. 4-5)
4. Given John's message (vv. 7-8), what type of person is the crowd anticipating? (see Isaiah 32:15-20)

5. What from your life illustrates what it means to repent?

Why is that the starting point for coming to Jesus?

6. John the Baptist prepared “the way for the Lord.” Who prepared the way for the Lord in your life?

7. As Jesus came out of the water as He was being baptized, what did the voice from heaven say?

8. What do you think the dove and voice (vv. 10-11) meant to Jesus as He came out of the water?

As He entered the desert?

During His temptation? (Matthew 4:1-11 contains an account of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness)

How would all this prepare Him for what lies ahead?

**Wrap up:** What would you like to hear God say to you?

**Prayer:** For one another

For our outreach efforts

# Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

## Chapter 1

When you experience the excitement of a big event, you naturally want to tell someone. Telling the story can bring back that original thrill as you relive the experience. Reading Mark's first words, you can sense his excitement. Picture yourself in the crowd as Jesus heals and teaches. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Respond to his words of love and encouragement. And remember that Jesus came for us who live today as well as for those who lived 2,000 years ago.

### Notes for Verse 1

**1:1** Mark was not one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, but he probably knew Jesus personally. Mark wrote his Gospel in the form of a fast-paced story, like a popular novel. The book portrays Jesus as a man who backed up his words with action that constantly proved who he is -- the Son of God. Because Mark wrote the Gospel for Christians in Rome, where many gods were worshiped, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus is *the one true* Son of God.

### Notes for Verse 2

Jesus came at a time in history when the entire civilized world was relatively peaceful under Roman rule, travel was easy, and there was a common language. The news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection could spread quickly throughout the vast Roman empire.

In Israel, common men and women were ready for Jesus too. There had been no God-sent prophets for 400 years, since the days of Malachi (who wrote the last book of the Old Testament). There was growing anticipation that a great prophet, or the Messiah mentioned in the Old Testament, would soon come (see Luke 3:15).

**1:2,3** Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. The second half of the book of Isaiah is devoted to the promise of salvation. Isaiah wrote about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the man who would announce his coming, John the Baptist. John's call to "make straight paths for him" meant that people should give up their selfish way of living, renounce their sins, seek God's forgiveness, and establish a relationship with the almighty God by believing and obeying his words as found in Scripture (Isaiah 1:18-20; Isaiah 57:15).

**1:2,3** Mark 1:2, 3 is a composite quotation, taken first from Malachi 3:1 and then from Isaiah 40:3.

**1:2,3** Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had predicted that John the Baptist and Jesus would come. How did he know? God promised Isaiah that a Redeemer would come to Israel, and that a messenger calling in the desert would prepare the way for him. Isaiah's words comforted many people as they looked forward to the Messiah, and knowing that God keeps his promises can comfort you too. As you read the book of Mark, realize that it is more than just a story; it is part of God's Word. In it God is revealing to you his plans for human history.

### Notes for Verse 4

Why does the Gospel of Mark begin with the story of John the Baptist and not mention the story of Jesus' birth? Important Roman officials of this day were always preceded by an announcer or herald. When the herald arrived in town, the people knew that someone of prominence would soon arrive. Because Mark's audience was primarily Roman Christians, he began his book with John the Baptist, whose mission it was to announce the coming of Jesus, the most important man who ever lived. Roman Christians would have been less interested in Jesus' birth than in this messenger who prepared the way.

**1:4** John chose to live in the desert (1) to get away from distractions so he could hear God's instructions; (2) to capture the undivided attention of the people; (3) to symbolize a sharp break with the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who preferred their luxurious homes and positions of authority over doing God's work; (4) to fulfill Old Testament prophecies that said John would be "a voice of one calling: in the desert prepare the way for the LORD" (Isaiah 40:3).

**1:4** In John's ministry, baptism was a visible sign that a person had decided to change his or her life, giving up a sinful and selfish way of living and turning to God. John took a known custom and gave it new meaning. The Jews often baptized non-Jews who had converted to Judaism. But to baptize a Jew as a sign of repentance was a radical departure from Jewish custom. The early church took baptism a step further, associating it with Jesus' death and resurrection (see, for example, Romans 6:3, 4; 1 Peter 3:21).

### Notes for Verse 5

The purpose of John's preaching was to prepare people to accept Jesus as God's Son. When John challenged the people to confess sin individually, he signaled the start of a new way to relate to God.

Is change needed in your life before you can hear and understand Jesus' message? You have to admit that you need forgiveness before you can accept it. To prepare to receive Christ, repent. Denounce the world's dead-end attractions, sinful temptations, and harmful attitudes.

#### Notes for Verse 6

John's clothes were not the latest style of his day. He dressed much like the prophet Elijah (2Kings 1:8) in order to distinguish himself from the religious leaders, whose flowing robes reflected their great pride in their position (Mark 12:38). John's striking appearance reinforced his striking message.

#### Notes for Verses 7,8

Although John was the first genuine prophet in 400 years, Jesus the Messiah would be infinitely greater than he. John was pointing out how insignificant he was compared to the one who was coming. John was not even worthy of doing the most menial tasks for him, like untying his sandals. What John began, Jesus finished. What John prepared, Jesus fulfilled.

#### Notes for Verse 8

John said Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, sending the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. John's baptism with water prepared a person to receive Christ's message. This baptism demonstrated repentance, humility, and willingness to turn from sin. This was the *beginning* of the spiritual process.

When Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, however, the entire person is transformed by the Spirit's power. Jesus offers to us both forgiveness of sin and the power to live for him.

#### Notes for Verse 9

If John's baptism was for repentance from sin, why was Jesus baptized? While even the greatest prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) had to confess their sinfulness and need for repentance, Jesus didn't need to admit sin -- he was sinless. Although Jesus didn't need forgiveness, he was baptized for the following reasons: (1) to begin his mission to bring the message of salvation to all people; (2) to show support for John's ministry; (3) to identify with our humanness and sin; (4) to give us an example to follow. We know that John's baptism was different from Christian baptism in the church because Paul had John's followers baptized again (see Acts 19:2-5).

**1:9** Jesus grew up in Nazareth, where he had lived since he was a young boy (Matthew 2:22, 23). Nazareth was a small town in Galilee, located about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. The city was despised and avoided by many Jews because it had a reputation for independence. Nazareth was a crossroads for trade routes and had contact with other cultures. (See also John 1:46.)

#### Notes for Verses 10,11

The Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus, and the voice from heaven proclaimed the Father's approval of Jesus as his divine Son. That Jesus is God's divine Son is the foundation for all we read about Jesus in the Gospels. Here we see all three members of the Trinity together -- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

#### Notes for Verses 12,13

Jesus left the crowds and went into the desert where he was tempted by Satan. Temptation is bad for us only when we give in. We should not hate or resent times of inner testing, because through them God can strengthen our character and teach us valuable lessons. When you face Satan and must deal with his temptations and the turmoil he brings, remember Jesus. He used God's Word against Satan and won. You can do the same.

**1:12,13** Satan is an angel who rebelled against God. He is real, not symbolic, and is constantly working against God and those who obey him. Satan tempted Eve in the garden and persuaded her to sin; he tempted Jesus in the desert and did not persuade him to fall. To be tempted is not a sin. Tempting others or giving in to temptation *is* sin. For a more detailed account of Jesus' temptation, read Matthew 4:1-11.

#### Map: Jesus Begins His Ministry

**1:12,13** To identify fully with human beings, Jesus had to endure Satan's temptations. Although Jesus is God, he is also man. And as fully human, he was not exempt from Satan's attacks. Because Jesus faced temptations and overcame them, he can assist us in two important ways: (1) as an example of how to face temptation without sinning, and (2) as a helper who knows just what we need because he went through the same experience. (See Hebrews 4:16 for more on Jesus and temptation.)

# Who IS this Jesus?

## His Authority and Characteristics of Ministry

### Mark 1:14-39

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

#### The First Disciples

14 Later on, after John was arrested by Herod Antipas, Jesus went to Galilee to preach God's Good News. 15 **"At last the time has come!"** he announced. **"The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!"**

16 One day as Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. 17 Jesus called out to them, **"Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!"** 18 And they left their nets at once and went with him.

19 A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat mending their nets. 20 He called them, too, and immediately they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men and went with him.

#### Jesus Casts Out an Evil Spirit

21 Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum, and every Sabbath day he went into the synagogue and taught the people. 22 They were amazed at his teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority--quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

23 A man possessed by an evil spirit was in the synagogue, 24 and he began shouting, "Why are you bothering us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One sent from God!"

25 Jesus cut him short. **"Be silent! Come out of the man."** 26 At that, the evil spirit screamed and threw the man into a convulsion, but then he left him.

27 Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. "What sort of new teaching is this?" they asked excitedly. "It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!" 28 The news of what he had done spread quickly through that entire area of Galilee.

#### Jesus Heals Many People

29 After Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they went over to Simon and Andrew's home, and James and John were with them. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. 31 He went to her bedside, and as he took her by the hand and helped her to sit up, the fever suddenly left, and she got up and prepared a meal for them.

32 That evening at sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. 33 And a huge crowd of people from all over Capernaum gathered outside the door to watch. 34 So Jesus healed great numbers of sick people who had many different kinds of diseases, and he ordered many demons to come out of their victims. But because they knew who he was, he refused to allow the demons to speak.

#### Jesus Preaches in Galilee

35 The next morning Jesus awoke long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray. 36 Later Simon and the others went out to find him. 37 They said, "Everyone is asking for you."

38 But he replied, **"We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came."** 39 So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and expelling demons from many people.

Mark 1:14-39 (NLT)

☞ **PRAY for God's guidance**

1. Who was one of your best teachers? What made that teacher so good?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus started His public ministry in a synagogue?

What two things about Jesus amazed the people (vv. 22, 27)? Why?

3. What does it mean to teach “with authority”?

What was the nature and source of Jesus’ authority?

4. On a scale of 1 - 10, how much authority does Jesus have in your life?

What would you have to cast out to rate a 10?

5. Why do you think Jesus healed people?

6. How does Jesus’ healing (vv. 30-31) compare with His exorcism (v. 25)?

What new realm of authority is seen here?

7. How do you picture the scene in verses 32 - 34?

After a day like this (vv. 29 -34) what pressures could Jesus feel as a new day dawns?

What might he pray about? How might this relate to His decision to move on (v. 38)?

8. What do you do when you need to get away and be alone with God?

9. What difference has getting alone to pray made (or could it make) in handling the stress in your life?

**Wrap up:** How does this Scripture passage speak to your life?

**Prayer:** For one another

## Commentary from the Life Application Bible

### Notes for Verses 14,15

What is the good news of God? These first words spoken by Jesus in Mark give the core of his teaching: that the long-awaited Messiah has come to break the power of sin and begin God's personal reign on earth. Most of the people who heard this message were oppressed, poor, and without hope. Jesus' words were good news because they offered freedom, justice, and hope.

### Notes for Verse 16

Fishing was a major industry around the Sea of Galilee. Fishing with nets was the most common method. Capernaum, the largest of the more than 30 fishing towns around the lake at that time, became Jesus' new home (Matthew 4:12, 13).

**1:16-20** We often assume that Jesus' disciples were great men of faith from the first time they met Jesus. But they had to grow in their faith just as all believers do (Mark 14:48-50, 66-72; John 14:1-9; John 20:26-29). This is apparently not the only time Jesus called Peter (Simon), James, and John to follow him (see Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-42 for two other times). Although it took time for Jesus' call and his message to get through, the disciples *followed*. In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus.

### Notes for Verse 21

Because the temple in Jerusalem was too far for many Jews to travel to regularly for worship, many towns had synagogues serving both as places of worship and as schools. Beginning in the days of Ezra, about 450 B.C., a group of ten Jewish families could start a synagogue. There, during the week, Jewish boys were taught the Old Testament law and Jewish religion. Girls could not attend. Each Saturday, the Sabbath, the Jewish men would gather to listen to a rabbi teach from the Scriptures. Because there was no permanent rabbi or teacher, it was customary for the synagogue leader to ask visiting teachers to speak. This is why Jesus often spoke in the synagogues in the towns he visited.

**1:21** Jesus had recently moved to Capernaum from Nazareth (Matthew 4:12, 13). Capernaum was a thriving town with great wealth as well as great sin and decadence. Because it was the headquarters for many Roman troops, pagan influences from all over the Roman empire were pervasive. This was an ideal place for Jesus to challenge both Jews and non-Jews with the gospel of God's kingdom.

### Notes for Verse 22

The Jewish teachers often quoted from well-known rabbis to give their words more authority. But Jesus didn't have that need. Because Jesus is God, he knew exactly what the Scriptures said and meant. He was the ultimate authority.

### Notes for Verse 23

Evil spirits, or demons, are ruled by Satan. They work to tempt people to sin. They were not created by Satan -- because God is the Creator of all. Rather they are fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion. Though not all disease comes from Satan, demons can cause a person to become mute, deaf, blind, or insane. But in every case where demons confronted Jesus, they lost their power. Thus God limits what evil spirits can do; they can do nothing without his permission. During Jesus' life on earth, demons were allowed to be very active to demonstrate once and for all Christ's power and authority over them.

**1:23ff** Many psychologists dismiss all accounts of demon-possession as a primitive way to describe mental illness. Although throughout history mental illness has often been wrongly diagnosed as demon-possession, clearly a hostile outside force controlled the man described here. Mark emphasized Jesus' conflict with evil powers to show his superiority over them, so he recorded many

stories about Jesus driving out evil spirits. Jesus didn't have to conduct an elaborate exorcism ritual. His word was enough to send out the demons.

**1:23,24** The evil spirit knew at once that Jesus was the Holy One of God. By including this event in his Gospel, Mark was establishing Jesus' credentials, showing that even the spiritual underworld recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

#### Notes for Verses 29-31

Each Gospel writer had a slightly different perspective as he wrote; thus the comparable stories in the Gospels often highlight different details. In Matthew, Jesus touched the woman's hand. In Mark, he helped her up. In Luke, he spoke to the fever, and it left her. The accounts do not conflict. Each writer chose to emphasize different details of the story in order to emphasize a certain characteristic of Jesus.

#### Notes for Verses 32,33

The people came to Jesus in the evening after sunset. This was the Sabbath (Mark 1:21), their day of rest, lasting from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. The Jewish leaders had proclaimed that it was against the law to be healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10; Luke 13:14). The people didn't want to break this law or the Jewish law that prohibited traveling on the Sabbath, so they waited until sunset. After the sun went down, the crowds were free to find Jesus so he could heal them.

#### Notes for Verse 34

Why didn't Jesus want the demons to reveal who he was? (1) By commanding the demons to remain silent, Jesus proved his authority and power over them. (2) Jesus wanted the people to believe he was the Messiah because of what he said and did, not because of the demons' words. (3) Jesus wanted to reveal his identity as the Messiah according to his timetable, not according to Satan's timetable. Satan wanted the people to follow Jesus around for what they could get out of him, not because he was the Son of God who could truly set them free from sin's guilt and power.

#### Notes for Verse 35

Jesus took time to pray. Finding time to pray is not easy, but prayer is the vital link between us and God. Like Jesus, we must break away from others to talk with God, even if we have to get up very early in the morning to do it!

#### Notes for Verse 39

The Romans divided the land of Israel into three separate regions: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Galilee was the northernmost region, an area about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide. Jesus did much of his ministry in this area, an ideal place for him to teach because there were over 250 towns concentrated there, with many synagogues.



# Jesus Touches the Untouchables

Mark 1:40 - 2:12

## ☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy

**40** A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you want to, you can make me well again," he said.

**41** Moved with pity, Jesus touched him. *"I want to,"* he said. *"Be healed!"* **42** Instantly the leprosy disappeared--the man was healed.

**43** Then Jesus sent him on his way and told him sternly, **44** *"Go right over to the priest and let him examine you. Don't talk to anyone along the way. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy, so everyone will have proof of your healing."*

**45** But as the man went on his way, he spread the news, telling everyone what had happened to him. As a result, such crowds soon surrounded Jesus that he couldn't enter a town anywhere publicly. He had to stay out in the secluded places, and people from everywhere came to him there.

Mark 2

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

**1** Several days later Jesus returned to Capernaum, and the news of his arrival spread quickly through the town. **2** Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there wasn't room for one more person, not even outside the door. And he preached the word to them. **3** Four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. **4** They couldn't get to Jesus through the crowd, so they dug through the clay roof above his head. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. **5** Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, *"My son, your sins are forgiven."*

**6** But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there said to themselves, **7** "What? This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins!"

**8** Jesus knew what they were discussing among themselves, so he said to them, *"Why do you think this is blasphemy? **9** Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk'? **10** I will prove that I, the Son of Man, have the authority on earth to forgive sins."* Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, **11** *"Stand up, take your mat, and go on home, because you are healed!"*

**12** The man jumped up, took the mat, and pushed his way through the stunned onlookers. Then they all praised God. "We've never seen anything like this before!" they exclaimed.

Mark 2:1-12 (NLT)

## ☞ PRAY for God's guidance

1. What kinds of "things" make people feel unworthy to come to Jesus?
2. Why is the leper unsure of Jesus' desire to help? (See Leviticus 13:45,46)
3. What is significant about Jesus touching the leper prior to healing him?

What do the crowds expect?

4. In a crisis, even at 3 AM, which four friends would you call?

5. What would you be seeing and feeling if you were in this crowd (vv. 1-4)?
  
6. Why are the teachers so upset? In their minds, how are sin and the authority of God linked? (see John 9:1-3)
  
7. Why didn't Jesus just heal the man like everyone expected?

What new insight about the kingdom and Himself is Jesus revealing?

8. In what ways is sin like paralysis or leprosy?
  
9. What freedoms/healings has Jesus' word of forgiveness given you?

**Wrap up:** If you had friends who would take you to Jesus for healing today, what kind of healing would you ask for? A. physical B. spiritual C. emotional D. relational

**Prayer:** For one another

How can you pray for and "touch lepers" or aid "paralytics" you know?

Notes for Lev. 13: 45,46

A person with an infectious skin disease had to perform this strange ritual to protect others from coming too near. Because the disease described in Leviticus was often contagious, it was important that people stay away from those who had it.

Notes for Verses 40,41

In keeping with the law in Leviticus 13 and 14, Jewish leaders declared people with leprosy unclean. This meant that lepers were unfit to participate in any religious or social activity. Because the law said that contact with any unclean person made a person unclean too, some people even threw rocks at lepers to keep them at a safe distance. Even the mention of the name of this disabling disease terrified people. But Jesus touched this man who had leprosy.

The real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person's body may be diseased or deformed, the person inside is no less valuable to God. No person is too disgusting for God's touch. In a sense, we are all people with leprosy because we have all been deformed by the ugliness of sin. But God, by sending his Son Jesus, has touched us, giving us the opportunity to be healed. When you feel repulsed by someone, stop and remember how God feels about that person -- and about you.

Notes for Verses 43,44

Although leprosy was incurable, many different types of skin diseases were classified together as "leprosy." According to the Old Testament laws about leprosy (Leviticus 13; 14 Leviticus 14), when a leper was cured, he or she had to go to a priest to be examined. Then the leper was to give a thank offering at the temple. Jesus adhered to these laws by sending the man to the priest, demonstrating Jesus' complete regard for God's law. Sending a healed leper to a priest was also a way to verify Jesus' great miracle to the community.

## Chapter 2

Notes for Verse 3

The paralytic's need moved his friends to action, and they brought him to Jesus. When you recognize someone's need, do you act? Many people have physical and spiritual needs you can meet, either by yourself or with others who are also concerned. Human need moved these four men; let it also move you to compassionate action.

Notes for Verse 4

Houses in Bible times were built of stone. They had flat roofs made of mud mixed with straw. Outside stairways led to the roofs. These friends may have carried the lame man up the outside stairs to the roof. They then could easily have taken apart the mud and straw mixture to make a hole through which to lower their friend to Jesus.

Notes for Verses 5-7

Before saying to the paralytic, "Get up," Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." To the Jewish leaders this statement was blasphemous, claiming to do something only God could do. According to the law, the punishment for this sin was death (Leviticus 24:15, 16).

The religious leaders understood correctly that Jesus was claiming divine prerogatives, but their judgment of him was wrong. Jesus was not blaspheming because his claim was true. Jesus is God, and he proved his claim by healing the paralytic (Mark 2:9-12).

Notes for Verse 10

This is the first time in Mark that Jesus is referred to as the "Son of Man." The title *Son of Man* emphasizes that Jesus is fully human, while *Son of God* (see, for example, John 20:31) emphasizes that he is fully God. As God's Son, Jesus has the authority to forgive sin. As a man, he can identify with our deepest needs and sufferings and help us overcome sin (see the note on Mark 8:29-31).

Notes for John 9:1-3

In chapter 9, we see four different reactions to Jesus. The neighbors revealed surprise and skepticism; the Pharisees showed disbelief and prejudice; the parents believed but kept quiet for fear of excommunication; and the healed man showed consistent, growing faith.

Notes for Verses 2,3

A common belief in Jewish culture was that calamity or suffering was the result of some great sin. But Christ used this man's suffering to teach about faith and to glorify God. We live in a fallen world where good behavior is not always rewarded and bad behavior not always punished. Therefore, innocent people sometimes suffer. If God took suffering away whenever we asked, we would follow him for comfort and convenience, not out of love and devotion. Regardless of the reasons for our suffering, Jesus has the power to help us deal with it. When you suffer from a disease, tragedy, or disability, try not to ask, "Why did this happen to me?" or "What did I do wrong?" Instead, ask God to give you strength for the trial and a clearer perspective on what is happening.

# **We've Never Done It That Way Before!**

**Mark 2:13-28**

👉 **What would you like to praise God for today?**

## **Jesus Calls Levi (Matthew)**

**13** Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that gathered around him. **14** As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax-collection booth. **"Come, be my disciple,"** Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

**15** That night Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. (There were many people of this kind among the crowds that followed Jesus.) **16** But when some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with people like that, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

**17** When Jesus heard this, he told them, **"Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."**

## A Discussion about Fasting

**18** John's disciples and the Pharisees sometimes fasted. One day some people came to Jesus and asked, "Why do John's disciples and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast?"

**19** Jesus replied, **"Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. They can't fast while they are with the groom. 20 But someday he will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. 21 And who would patch an old garment with unshrunk cloth? For the new patch shrinks and pulls away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger hole than before. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The wine would burst the wineskins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine needs new wineskins."**

## A Discussion about the Sabbath

**23** One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of wheat. **24** But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "They shouldn't be doing that! It's against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath."

**25** But Jesus replied, **"Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what King David did when he and his companions were hungry? 26 He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was high priest), ate the special bread reserved for the priests alone, and then gave some to his companions. That was breaking the law, too." 27** Then he said to them, **"The Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath. 28 And I, the Son of Man, am master even of the Sabbath!"**

Mark 2:13-28 (NLT)

👉 **PRAY for God's guidance**

1. Do you "fix and mend" or "toss and replace"? Why?
2. The disciples who were fishermen (1:16-19) may have paid inflated taxes to Levi for years. How would they feel when Jesus called him to be a disciple?

Why might Jesus have called him?

3. What is the problem Jesus is confronting in vv. 13 -17?  
Discuss the balance of "being in the world but not of the world".

4. How mature and how much training should a new believer have before they begin to witness?
5. Why did John's disciples and the Pharisees fast? (see Lev. 16:29,31; 23:27,29,31)

Why did Jesus' disciples NOT fast? What was Jesus trying to communicate... how do vv.19 -22 answer this question?

6. What does the new wine represent? What do the old wineskins represent?

What makes it difficult to be remain like "new wineskins"? ...easy?

7. Re-read Mark 2:23-27. What is the complaint about Jesus here? (see Ex. 34:21)

What benefits from this law come to mind?

Why was this not stealing? (see Lev. 19:9,10; Deut. 23:25)

How does David's story apply to Jesus' situation? (see 1 Samuel 21:1-6)

8. Do vv. 27, 28 mean we are free from the fourth commandment (Ex. 20: 9-11) and can do whatever we want on Sundays? Explain.

**Wrap up:** How has the "wine" of Jesus burst some of your "old wineskins"?

- a. regarding Sundays (2:23-28)
- b. regarding your relationship with God (2:18-22)
- c. regarding other people (2:13-17)

**Prayer:** For one another

For others. Are there people you have been neglecting because of their reputation?

## Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

### Notes for Verse 14

Levi is another name for Matthew, the disciple who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. See Matthew's Profile in Matthew 9 for more information.

**2:14** Capernaum was a key military center for Roman troops, as well as a thriving business community. Several major highways intersected in Capernaum, with merchants passing through from as far away as Egypt to the south and Mesopotamia to the north.

Levi (Matthew), a Jew, was appointed by the Romans to be the area's tax collector. He collected taxes from citizens as well as from merchants passing through town. Tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected. Most of them overcharged and vastly enriched themselves. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews because of their reputation for cheating and their support of Rome. The Jews must also have hated to think that some of the money collected went to support pagan religions and temples.

**2:14,15** The day that Levi met Jesus, Levi held a meeting at his house to introduce others to Jesus. Levi didn't waste any time starting to witness! Some people feel that new believers should wait for maturity or training before they begin to tell others about Christ. But like Levi, new believers can share their faith right away with whatever knowledge, skill, or experience they already have.

### Notes for Verses 16,17

The self-righteous Pharisees were indignant that Jesus would eat a meal with such sinners. But Jesus gladly associated with sinners because he loved them and because he knew that they needed to hear what he had to say. Jesus spent time with whoever needed or wanted to hear his message -- poor, rich, bad, good. We, too, must befriend those who need Christ, even if they do not seem to be ideal companions. Are there people you have been neglecting because of their reputation? They may be the ones who most need to see and hear the message of Christ's love in and from you.

### Notes for Verse 18ff

John had two goals: to lead people to repent of their sin, and to prepare them for Christ's coming. John's message was sobering, so he and his followers fasted. Fasting is both an outward sign of humility and regret for sin, and an inner discipline that clears the mind and keeps the spirit alert. Fasting empties the body of food; repentance empties the life of sin. Jesus' disciples did not need to fast to prepare for his coming because he was with them. Jesus did not condemn fasting, however. He himself fasted for 40 days (Matthew 4:2). Nevertheless, Jesus emphasized fasting with the right motives. The Pharisees fasted twice a week to show others how holy they were. Jesus explained that if people fast only to impress others, they will be twisting the purpose of fasting.

### Notes for Verse 19

Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom. In the Bible, the image of a bride is often used for God's people, and the image of a bridegroom for the God who loves them (Isaiah 62:5; Matthew 25:1-14; Revelation 21:2).

### Notes for Verse 22

A wineskin was a goatskin sewed together at the edges to form a watertight bag. New wine, expanding as it aged, stretched the wineskin. New wine, therefore, could not be put into a wineskin that had already been stretched, or the taut skin would burst.

The Pharisees had become rigid like old wineskins. They could not accept faith in Jesus that would not be contained or limited by man-made ideas or rules. Your heart, like a wineskin, can become rigid and prevent you from accepting the new life that Christ offers. Keep your heart pliable and open to accepting the life-changing truths of Christ.

### Notes for Verse 23

Jesus and his disciples were not stealing when they picked the grain. Leviticus 19:9, 10 and Deuteronomy 23:25 say that farmers were to leave the edges of their fields unharvested so that some of their crops could be picked by travelers and by the poor. Just as walking on a sidewalk is not trespassing on private property, picking heads of grain at the edge of a field was not stealing.

#### Notes for Verse 24

God's law said that crops should not be harvested on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21). This law prevented farmers from becoming greedy and ignoring God on the Sabbath. It also protected laborers from being overworked.

The Pharisees interpreted the action of Jesus and his disciples -- picking the grain and eating it as they walked through the fields -- as harvesting; and so they judged Jesus a lawbreaker. But Jesus and the disciples clearly were not harvesting the grain for personal gain; they were simply looking for something to eat. The Pharisees were so focused on the words of the rule that they missed its intent.

**2:24** Many of the Pharisees were so caught up in their man-made laws and traditions that they lost sight of what was good and right. Jesus implied in Mark 3:4 that the Sabbath is a day to do good. God provided the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, but he didn't mean that concern for rest should keep us from lifting a finger to help others. Don't allow your Sabbath to become a time of selfish indulgence.

#### Notes for Verses 25-28

Jesus used the example of David to point out how ridiculous the Pharisees' accusations were (this incident occurred in 1 Samuel 21:1-6). God created the Sabbath for our benefit, not his own. God derives no benefit from having us rest on the Sabbath, but we are restored both physically and spiritually when we take time to rest and to focus on God. For the Pharisees, Sabbath laws had become more important than Sabbath rest. Both David and Jesus understood that the intent of God's law is to promote love for God and others. When we apply a law to other people, we should make sure that we understand its purpose and intent so we don't make harmful or inappropriate judgments.

#### Notes for Verse 26

The "consecrated bread" was the bread set before God in the tabernacle. Every Sabbath, 12 baked loaves of bread were placed on the table in the Holy Place. Then the priests ate the old ones. See Exodus 25:30 and Leviticus 24:5-9 for more about the consecrated bread, also called the bread of the Presence.

### **Chapter 3      Notes for Verse 2**

Already the Pharisees had turned against Jesus. They were jealous of his popularity, his miracles, and the authority in his teaching and actions. They valued their status in the community and their opportunity for personal gain so much that they lost sight of their goal as religious leaders -- to point people toward God. Of all people, the Pharisees should have recognized the Messiah, but they refused to acknowledge him because they were not willing to give up their treasured position and power. When Jesus exposed their attitudes, he became their enemy instead of their Messiah, and they began looking for ways to turn the people against him.

#### Notes for Verse 5

Jesus was angry about the Pharisees' uncaring attitudes. Anger itself is not wrong. It depends on what makes us angry and what we do with our anger. Too often we express our anger in selfish and harmful ways. By contrast, Jesus expressed his anger by correcting a problem -- healing the man's hand. Use your anger to find constructive solutions rather than to tear people down.

#### Notes for Verse 6

The Pharisees were a Jewish religious group that zealously followed the Old Testament laws, as well as their own religious traditions. They were highly respected in the community, but they hated Jesus because he challenged their proud attitudes and dishonorable motives.

The Herodians were a Jewish political party that hoped to restore Herod the Great's line to the throne. Jesus was a threat to them as well because he challenged their political ambitions. The Pharisees and Herodians, normally enemies, joined forces against Jesus because he exposed them for what they were.

**3:6** The Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking their law that said medical attention could be given to no one on the Sabbath except in matters of life and death. Ironically, the Pharisees themselves were breaking God's law by plotting murder.



