

Mark 2:1-17 ~ Scripture Verses

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

¹ A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

The Calling of Levi

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

[New International Version, NIV, 1984]

Mark 2:1-17 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What do you think would be the most difficult thing about being paralyzed? Are there types of paralysis other than physical? Name some.
2. What dilemma did the paralytic man and his friends face? (2:2-4) Have you ever tried to get into a room or club that was overcrowded? What was the result?
3. How did the paralytic man's friends solve their dilemma and get Jesus' attention?
4. What motivated Jesus to respond to the paralytic man's plight? What did he say to him? (2:5) Why do you suppose that he chose to forgive the man's sins before healing him physically?
5. Which is easier for you to do: A) forgive others or B) care for them while they are sick?
6. Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy? (2:7)
7. How did Jesus respond to the thoughts of the Pharisees? How did he show he had the authority to forgive sins? (2:8-11)
8. What feelings or attitudes do you have about the IRS? How do you think people felt about Levi in his tax collector's booth? Where did he stand officially? (2:14)
9. What did Levi stand to lose by leaving his work to follow Jesus? (2:14)
10. From Luke (5:27-32) we learn that Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus, which was attended by other tax collectors and "sinners." Who were these sinners? What was the significance of eating with them?
11. From Matthew 9:9, we learn that Levi was also called Matthew, perhaps given that name by Jesus as he done with Peter. Why might Jesus do this?
12. How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus' actions? What was it about Jesus' life-style and attitude that made the Pharisees so uncomfortable?
13. How do some churches today tend to treat "tax collectors?" How should we treat the outcasts of society? Do you do so?

Mark 2:1-17 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What do you think would be the most difficult thing about being paralyzed? Are there types of paralysis other than physical? Name some.

2. What dilemma did the paralytic man and his friends face? (2:2-4) Have you ever tried to get into a room or club that was overcrowded? What was the result?

Nothing definite can be said about the paralyzed man's condition other than he could not walk. The determination of his four friends' determination to reach Jesus suggests that his condition was desperate. But with the scores of people crowding into a small space and even outside the door, it was impossible for them to get near to Jesus.

3. How did the paralytic man's friends solve their dilemma and get Jesus' attention?

A typical house in the Middle East had a flat roof accessible by an outside staircase or ladder. The roof was often made from a thick layer of packed clay supported by mats of branches across wood beams. Peter, his wife, and mother-in-law were probably not thrilled that these men made a large hole in their roof. However, it could be relatively easily repaired.

4. What motivated Jesus to respond to the paralytic man's plight? What did he say to him? (2:5) Why do you suppose that he chose to forgive the man's sins before healing him physically?

Mark noted that Jesus observed the faith of the man and his friends. He may well have healed him out of compassion also, but the verse notes the men's faith. Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus first met the man's deepest need: forgiveness. You might think that a paralyzed man doesn't have much opportunity to sin, but is that really true? Just because you can't physically commit a crime, that doesn't mean that you can't harbor bitterness, hatred, envy, lust. It doesn't mean that you honor your parents. It doesn't mean that you don't have idols.

There was another reason that Jesus chose to first forgive his sins as we learn in the rest of this section (2:6-12).

5. Which is easier for you to do: A) forgive others or B) care for them while they are sick?

I'm not asking here about you forgiving sins in the way that Jesus did; only God can do that. We're talking about forgiving someone for wronging you, for criticizing you, for taking credit for something you did, for not saving you a place.

It could be something big; it could be small; either way, you've been holding a grudge and with good reason, or so you think. It is easier to truly forgive that person or to pick up some Tylenol at the drug store and drop it by his house or go with a group of his buddies and visit him in the hospital?

6. Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy? (2:7)

In Jewish theology, only God could forgive sins. Jesus forgiving someone his sins was a claim to deity—which they considered blasphemous. Blasphemy included not only reviling the name of God but also any affront to his majesty or authority. The punishment for blasphemy under the law of Moses was death by stoning (Lev 24:16).

7. How did Jesus respond to the thoughts of the Pharisees? How did he show he had the authority to forgive sins? (2:8-11)

Jesus asked them whether it is easier to forgive sins or heal a paralytic? His point probably was that neither is easier. Both are equally impossible for people and equally easy for God.

Jesus' power to heal was a visible affirmation of his power to forgive sins. It seems clear that one purpose of Jesus' miracles was to give evidence of his deity.

8. What feelings or attitudes do you have about the IRS? How do you think people felt about Levi in his tax collector's booth? Where did he stand officially? (2:14)

A tax collector's booth was generally on toll road, in this case most likely on the "Great Trunk Road" that went south west from Damascus through Capernaum to the Mediterranean coast, and then south to Egypt.

Jewish tax collectors who worked for the Roman government were regarded as outcasts. They could not serve as witnesses or as judges and were barred from the synagogue. In the eyes of the Jewish community, their disgrace even extended to their families.

9. What did Levi stand to lose by leaving his work to follow Jesus? (2:14)

He would not only lose his job with the Roman government, he would also lose a secondary source of income as tax collectors were notorious for skimming money from the taxes collected. Moreover, it would be difficult for him to get a job in any Jewish business because of his poor reputation as a tax collector.

10. From Luke (5:27-32) we learn that Levi had a great banquet for Jesus, which was attended by other tax collectors and "sinners." Who were these people? What was the significance of eating with them?

In this context, “sinners” could refer both to evil people as well as to those who refused to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. The term was commonly used of tax collectors, adulterers, robbers, criminals, and the like. To eat with a person was a sign of friendship.

11. From Matthew 9:9, we learn that Levi was also called Matthew, perhaps given the name by Jesus as he did with Peter. Why might he do this?

First of all, Levi, the son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector and did not enjoy a good reputation in Capernaum. By calling him Matthew, which means “gift of the Lord,” Jesus both gave him a better self-image and also removed part of the stigma of his old name.

12. How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus’ actions? What was it about Jesus’ life-style and attitude that made the Pharisees so uncomfortable?

First of all, not all teachers of the law were Pharisees. The Pharisees were successors of the Hasidim, pious Jews that joined forces with the Maccabees during the struggle for freedom from Syrian oppression. Although some were godly, many of those who came into conflict with Jesus were hypocritical, envious, rigid, and formalistic. According to the Pharisees, God’s grace extended only to those who kept his law, specifically as they interpreted it.

Jesus kept talking to and being friendly with sinners, tax collectors, and people who didn’t rigidly follow the law as taught by the Pharisees. This made them angry. But they were also uncomfortable because Jesus was gaining many followers who believed in him and also, unless they were totally blind, he really was healing people, banishing evil spirits, and had a message that made sense.

13. Do some churches today tend to make “tax collectors” and “sinners” feel unwelcome? How? How should we treat the outcasts of society? Do you do so?

Mark 2:1-17 ~ Additional Discussion Questions

1. What was Jesus doing when they brought the paralyzed man to him? (2:2)
2. In Verses 2:2-4, what do the details of the story tell you about the A) the paralytic? B) His friends? C) Jesus' reputation? D) the people in the crowd?
3. What connection is there between a person's faith and God working in his life?
4. What does God require or not require to forgive us of our sins? (Mark 2:5 and Matthew 6:12 and 6:14-15)
5. What did Jesus mean by "the Son of Man?" (2:10)
6. What is one paralysis in your life from which you want Jesus to release you?
7. What do we learn about Levi (Matthew) from the kinds of friends he has that he invites to his banquet? (2:15) Why do you think Jesus asked him to "follow me?"
8. Why is it significant that Jesus went to Levi's (Matthew) house for dinner?
9. Why do you think that sinners and people of "ill repute" were so attracted to Jesus? (2:15)
10. When have you ever acted the same way they Pharisees did in this story?
11. What can you learn from Levi's example in this story? **Be specific!**
12. Sometimes when you feel unwelcome at a church or dinner or exclusive affair, it is because others are looking down on you (like the Pharisees did). But other times you may have brought it on yourself, for example, by inappropriate dress or boorish behavior. Paul said that Christians should not do things that would cause new believers or those with weak faith to stumble. What kind of things do you do (or have you seen done) that might cause others to doubt their faith?